



# 2010

# Skills & Drills



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# Introduction

## Welcome to PGSL!

Thank you for volunteering your time to coach a team! PGSL is chartered with the City of Pleasanton as an “Instructional” league. Therefore, your responsibility as a coach is not only to make sure your players are safe and have fun, but also to teach them the game of softball.

This booklet is provided to you to help you with that effort. At PGSL, we feel it is important that our players get consistent instruction. Therefore it is our desire that as players progress through the league, the skills and methods being taught are essentially the same from one team to the next.

This booklet represents our “curriculum” of what we ask that you teach your players. The skills and methods presented here are based on skills taught at Division 1 College softball programs. So, even though your players may be young now, if they start to learn proper mechanics early, they will not have to re-learn skills as they get older. This will maximize the development of their skills, which will maximize their enjoyment of the game.

## So Where do You Start?

So, what can you reasonably expect to teach your players? First of all, you will be amazed at what these kids can learn as long as the adults in their lives don't underestimate them!

### Basics:

Start with the basics and build on them. At a minimum, by the end of the season, we would expect that all of your players would have acquired some basic skills:

- The ability to throw the ball properly.
- The ability to catch the ball properly; (a thrown ball, grounders and fly balls).
- The ability to hit the ball using proper mechanics.
- A basic understanding of the rules.

### Positions:

You cannot reasonably expect to teach all of your players all positions. If you attempt to let all players play every position, they will not learn **any** position.

- Each player should be taught 2 or 3 positions. Place them in positions where they have a chance to succeed.
- At least 1 of these positions should be infield position, and strive to play each player in the infield at least one inning in every game.
- You should settle on approximately 3 pitchers, so that those pitchers get enough repetitions to become reasonably effective. (This is important to maximize everyone's enjoyment of the game).

## Sportsmanship

Above all, teach your kids sportsmanship:

- Teach your kids to cheer for and to support their team mates.
- Teach your kids never to cheer against the other team. Negative cheers that mock, humiliate, or attempt to distract the players on the opposing team are not what PGSL is about, (and will not be tolerated).

## How?

So how can you teach them all of these things?

- Be **Patient** with them, they won't get it the 1<sup>st</sup> time.
- **Consistency**...they will learn best if you and your assistants keep teaching the skills in a consistent manner.
- **Repetition**, repetition, repetition! Organize your practices so that every player gets lots of "rep's" and everyone is kept busy
- **Have a plan**, for every practice and every game.
- And above all, **Positive Reinforcement!** Show them the right way, and tell them what they are doing right, not what they are doing wrong. It is much more effective!

## How to use this book:

This book is designed for all ages and skill levels. Some skills presented here are divided into 3 Levels of experience:

1. **Level 1: Basic Fundamentals.** This is probably the most important, because if your players can't do the most fundamental skills consistently and with confidence, then they are not going to be able to move to something more challenging. These skills and drills are labeled "Level 1" or just "L1" in this book. Make sure your players can perform these skills before you attempt to teach them anything else. Mike Candrea, coach of the US National Team says, "You can't win at this game if you can't play catch".
2. **Level 2: Intermediate Skills** Once players have built a sound foundation in the fundamentals, then they are ready to develop further. Those skills and drills labeled "Level 2" or "L2" are some things to try next with your kids, but not until they are ready.
3. **Level 3: Advanced Skills** There are a few skills, but not many labeled "Level 3" or "L3". These are skills you probably shouldn't attempt with your players unless you are coaching a truly more advanced team. This book was not really intended to cover advanced skills, so there are not many here.

# “Ready” Position

## Basic “Ready” Position (Level 1)

- Player assumes “ready” position as the pitcher starts her wind-up, (Every Time).
- Player assumes an athletic position:
  - Some flex or bend in the knees and at the waste
  - Squared up to Home Plate.
  - Hands out front about waste high
  - Palms facing in, (thumbs of both hands to the sky).
- From this position, a player only needs to:
  - Turn her glove a quarter turn to fingers up to catch a ball above the waste, or
  - Turn her glove a quarter turn to fingers down to catch a ball below the waste or a ground ball.

## More Intermediate “Ready” Position (Level 2)

- Ready position is as above, but the player “walks into” this position or “creeps” into this position.
- As the pitcher is in her wind-up, the player takes a couple of short, steps in and then a very small hop, (Right, Left, Hop)\* ending up in the position described above.
- This gets the player moving forward and on the balls of her feet in a position to move quickly in any direction.
- Coach your players to time this so their ending little hop is timed with the ball entering the strike zone. But they need to be moving on **every pitch**.

## More Advanced “Ready” Position (Level 3)

- More advanced players will vary the above based on position.
- Infielders will bend at the knees and waste to get low more than outfielders.
- Corner infielders (1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>) will get even lower than middle infielders.
- Also, in advanced play the corner infielders are already pretty far in toward home, so, they will not creep in further to a ready position, but rather will “get light on their feet” in place as they adopt ready position.

\* Assumes right handed player

# Receiving a Thrown Ball

## **Basic Mechanics (Level 1):**

- Player starts in a “ready” position (see preceding section).
- The arms are extended slightly toward the thrower with the elbows slightly bent.
- As the ball comes, the glove position is adjusted to the direction of the throw.
  - Catch with fingers up whenever possible
  - Fingers down for low throws.
  - Fingers “point” to the ball
- As she catches the ball, she should flex her arms to lessen the impact, (“soft hands”).
- The bare hand secures the ball in the glove.

## **Receiving a Ball (Level 2):**

- Once players are reasonably comfortable with the above, coach your players to “move to the ball”. On a throw right to them, step forward toward the ball, don’t wait for it.
- On throws off to the side, coach players to move to get in front of it and catch it in front of their body.
- They can start the footwork of transitioning to a throw while they are catching it; start to step forward planting the throwing side foot out at 45 degrees to begin turning the hips and shoulders to a throwing position.

## **Points of Emphasis:**

- For beginners of all ages, the biggest obstacle to proper technique is fear of the ball. Remember that fear of the ball is not a lack of “courage” but a lack of “confidence”.
- Confidence can only come from experience. Repetition, repetition, repetition! (But encourage them to use proper mechanics every time).
- A common mistake is for players to catch the ball off to the side. Emphasize that players should get in front of the ball every time.
- Another common mistake is incorrect glove position. This is not only less effective, but can also increase chance of injury. Encourage players to use proper glove position every time. (See “Tracking” drill).



# Receiving a Thrown Ball (Cont'd)

## Drills:

1. **“Tracking”** -to teach proper glove position (*Level 1 drill*)
  - Coach stands directly in front of player, holding a ball.
  - Coach moves the ball to a variety of positions, high, low, left, right
  - Player moves glove to proper position as if to catch the ball where the coach is holding it, and wherever the coach moves it.
  
2. **“Playing Catch with a Coach”** - to reinforce proper mechanics while the player is learning. (*Level 1 drill*)
  - To get players to use proper glove positions and to get in front of the ball, break the players up into as many groups as you have coaches.
  - Have each coach stand in front of each player in line at a short distance.
  - Toss the ball easily to the player at a variety of heights and positions. Encourage the player to move to the ball and use the correct glove position.
  - The use of a short distance is designed to get past the natural fear of the ball in an inexperienced player. Move back to a greater distance as the player gains confidence.
  
3. **Simply Have your Players Play Catch** (*All Levels*)
  - *“You can’t win at this game if you can’t play catch”.*

# Throwing a Ball

## **Basic Overhand Throw:** \*Assumes right-handed player (*Level 1 skill*)

### **1. The Grip:**

- Grip the ball “across the seams” whenever possible
- Pads of first 3 fingers on a seam
- Thumb on the opposite seam (Thumb & Middle finger bisect the ball)
- Little finger curled along the side of the ball

### **2. Preparing to Throw:** (4 things happen at the same time):

- Step forward with Right foot (with foot pointed out toward 2:00 o'clock)
- The hips and shoulders turn completely sideways to the target
- Arm swing:
  - Arm swings down and back with thumb passing by leg
  - Arm continues back and up into an “L”, (Shoulder height)
  - Wrist is cocked with ball facing back and away
- Glove hand shoulder and elbow points toward target (thumb down)

### **3. Throw:**

- Step directly toward the target with the left foot, while
- Shoulders and hips rotate toward the target, Pull down and back on front shoulder.
- The arm comes forward retaining the “L” position, until
- The ball is released with the fingers on top of the ball with a elbow-wrist-fingers snap imparting a “12-6” spin. (clock reference)

### **4. Follow-Through:**

- After releasing the ball, the player throws the back (throwing) shoulder toward the target.
- The back leg may lift slightly off the ground
- The player finishes with the chest over the front knee, with the throwing hand continuing down to the opposite knee.

## **Other Throws:**

### **1. Outfield “Crow Hop”:** (*Level 2 skill*)

For more power an outfielder will use a “crow-hop” motion.

- As the player turns sideways and starts to move forward to throw, the player pushes off the left foot, leaping to land with the right foot pointed out, turning the hips and shoulders, before landing on the left.
- Footwork is “left, right, left”.

### **2. Under Hand Throw:** (*Level 1 skill*)

- For short throws (15-20 ft.), it is often best to use an underhand toss.
- The player should still step toward the target, and release the ball in a direct line.

## Throwing a Ball (cont'd)

### 3. Sidearm Throw: (Level 3 skill)

Often a more advanced player will use a sidearm motion when fielding a slowly hit infield ground ball where there is insufficient time to come upright to throw.

- The player fields the ground ball on the run.
- Then without rising up, swings the arm into an “L” position.
- Pulls the glove side shoulder back out of the way, turning the shoulders for the throw.
- Note: this is not truly a “sidearm” throw, as the relationship of the arm and shoulder is maintained almost as if it were overhand; upper body is just bent forward.
- Note: With the turning of the shoulders, the player is not throwing across the body.

#### Tips on Teaching:

- Break the throwing motion into its component parts and work on 1 component at a time with beginners.
- Work backwards.
  - Work on the proper wrist snap release first, (see “Release & Spin” drill)
  - Next start the girls in the body sideways / arm in the “L” position, and have them step and throw.
  - Lastly work on getting to the above position
- Encourage players to do it right every time. Most coaches have the girls start practice by playing catch to warm up their arms. This is fine, but make sure they are using proper throwing (& catching) technique.
- Start with shorter throws and then gradually move back to greater distances to develop strength.

#### Points of Emphasis:

- A common mistake new players make is that they do not get to the sideways position, resulting in a weak, inaccurate throw. Emphasize getting sideways, with the glove side shoulder and elbow pointing to the target.
- Another common mistake is players do not get their throwing elbow high. The elbow should be at or above shoulder height.
- Another common mistake is players do not get the wrist cocked. Emphasize that when the player has the arm in the “L” position, the player’s thumb on the throwing hand should be facing away from the body, the back of the hand is toward the player.
- Another common mistake is players release the ball too high without a good follow-through. Emphasize pulling down the front side shoulder as she starts the throw and a good follow-through.

# Throwing a Ball (cont'd)

## Drills:

1. **“Release & Spin”** - To develop proper release and spin (*Level 1*)
  - Partners face each other about 6 ft. away
  - One player holds the ball in throwing hand with proper grip and puts her throwing hand elbow in her glove at chest height
  - Partners throw the ball back and forth just isolating the wrist snap and release.
  - Players should focus on feeling the wrist snap and the ball rolling off the finger tips at release, with a “12-6” spin)
2. **“Bent Knee”** - To focus on proper use of both arms (*All Levels*)
  - Partners take positions about 30 ft. apart.
  - Players kneel on the throwing side knee, with the other leg bent with the foot flat on the ground. (Player angled about 45 degrees to throwing side)
  - The thrower points her glove at the target and throws using proper arm action
  - The receiver catches the ball and repeats.
3. **“Position Freeze”** -Focus on getting quickly to proper throwing position. (*Level 1*)
  - Players each have a ball, and start with it in the glove, and in a correct fielding position with the glove on the ground
  - Players take the ball out of the glove quickly and jump into a proper throwing position and freezes in that position
  - Coach evaluates proper positions and transitions.
  - Optionally, the coach can have the players continue from the freeze position to throw to a partner.
4. **“Around the Horn”** -Focus on properly turning the feet and body to throw (*Level 2*)
  - Players should be in groups of four, placed in a square, (distance apart depending on skill, size of the players and space).
  - The ball is thrown around the square.
  - Players focus on properly receiving the ball and then turning to the correct body position to throw to the next player.
  - Games can be made of this by either seeing how many successful throws and catches can be made in succession, or by making it a race.
  - For more advanced players, this drill can be done on the infield with players positioned at the 4 bases.
5. **“Throwing Relay”** - Focus on proper mechanics and “Game Speed” (*Level 2*)
  - Players are divided into 2 groups. Players in each group are placed in a straight line with players 20-30 ft. apart.
  - The groups of players must be in parallel lines with players equally spaced.
  - The player at one end of each line starts with the ball, and on the coach’s signal, throws to the next player in line.
  - Each player in line catches the ball and then throws to the next player in line, focusing on proper positioning to receive the ball and then turning quickly into a proper throwing position.
  - When the ball reaches the player at the end of the line, she throws back to the player she received it from to start the ball back down the line.
  - The first team to successfully throw the ball down the line and back “wins”.

# Fielding a Ground Ball

## **Fielding a Ball - Basic Skills – L1: (Assumes right-handed player)**

The following techniques assume that the ball is hit in the direction of the player fielding or close enough that the player can get in front of the ball fairly easily.

### **1. Approach to the ball**

- First get in front of the ball whenever possible.
- Get into position to field the ball inside the line of feet whenever possible, slightly off-center of the body to the glove side.
- Always field balls moving forward, (“charge” the ball)
- Gradually get low when approaching the ball, (like an airplane coming into land)

### **2. Field the ball:**

- As the ball approaches, “Square-up” to the ball using “Right-Left-Field” footwork, with the glove side foot slightly forward.
- Get low. Bend at the knees, Butt down, Head up (Do not bend at the waist)
- Hands out in front of toes. The point where the ball is fielded and the 2 feet should form an off-set triangle. (Off set slightly to the glove side)
- The glove side arm should maintain a slight bend at the elbow to absorb the ball.
- Back of glove, (not tip) is on the ground. Bare hand is above the glove. (“Alligator hands”)
- Watch the ball all the way in to the glove. (Person standing in front should see the top of the player’s head).

### **3. Transition to Throw:**

- After securing the ball, step with throwing side foot on a line to the target, but with the foot angled out at 45 degrees, (starts the hips to turn to throw).
- As the arm swings up into a throwing position, the hips and shoulders turn so that the glove side shoulder points toward the target.
- Step toward the target with the glove side foot and throw, (for more detail, see “Throwing a Ball” section).
- For a right hander, the entire footwork is: Right – Left – Field..... Right – Left – Throw.

# Fielding a Ground Ball (Cont'd)

## Fielding a Ball - Intermediate Skills - L2:

### 1. Approach to the ball (Add to the above)

- Round the ball. That is, instead of approaching the ball directly, bend your approach out slightly away from your target, so that....
- You field the ball moving more in the direction of your target, facilitating the transition to throw.

### 2. Field the ball: (Add to the above)

- As the ball approaches, pick your hop: "Short" Hop (just as it comes off the ground) or "Long" Hop, (near it's highest point)
- When fielding on the short hop, field moving the glove forward into the ball.
- When fielding on the long hop, absorb the ball with your hands into your body as you secure it.

### 3. Transition to Throw:

Variations on footwork, for balls hit to the player's left or right. The following assumes right handed player, transitioning to throw to 1<sup>st</sup>, (2B) and 2<sup>nd</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> (SS, 3B). (Obviously there are other variations for throws to other bases).

- For balls hit to the player's **left:** Use the "**replace the feet**" technique.
  - Pivot to the left and take a cross over step with the right foot, and run to the ball. Get in front of it if at all possible and square up on it, and field normally. Stretch out to field only if necessary.
  - After securing the ball, take a quick shuffle step where the Right foot hops to the place the left foot just was as the left foot begins to stride toward the target, thus "replacing the feet"
  - With this footwork, turn the hips and shoulders in line with the target and throw.
- For balls hit to the player's **right:** Use the "**plant & throw**" technique
  - Pivot to the right and take a cross over step with the left foot, and run to the ball. Get in front of it if at all possible and square up on it, and field normally. (Backhand plays discussed later)..
  - After securing the ball, just plant the right foot to stop your momentum, turn your hips and shoulders in line with the target, step with the left toward the target and throw.
  - Take special precaution to pull down with the glove side shoulder as you throw, as there is a tendency to throw high as the momentum is taking you away from the target.

# Fielding a Ground Ball (Cont'd)

## Fielding a Ball - Advanced Skills L3:

### Backhand Plays (Assumes right-handed player)

Coach your players to attempt to field a ball with a backhand motion only if there is no other choice. If at all possible they should always get in front of the ball. The following assumes the ball is hit sufficiently to the player's right, that a backhand attempt is the only option.

#### **1. Approach to the ball**

- Take a cross over step with the left foot and angle back toward the outfield grass.
- As you approach the ball, get as low as possible.

#### **2. Field the ball:**

- As the ball approaches, field the ball with the glove out in front, backhand, with fingers down.
- The glove side arm should maintain a slight bend at the elbow to absorb the ball.

#### **3. Transition to Throw:**

You can't always control whether you will need to field the ball off your left or right foot.

- If you field it off your left foot, step through right foot, plant and throw. Take special precaution to pull down with the glove side shoulder as you throw, as there will be a tendency to throw high.
- If you field it off your right foot, simply plant and throw. Again, take special precaution to pull down with the glove side shoulder as you throw, as there will be a tendency to throw high.

### "Do or Die" Plays (Assumes right-handed player)

On a slowly hit ball, your player may not always have the time to stop and set themselves to make the throw. The following technique is only for that situation.

#### **1. Approach to the ball**

- Approach the ball on the run
- Get as low as possible.

#### **2. Field the ball:**

- As you approach the ball simply attempt to field the ball off the glove side foot without stopping.
- The glove side arm should maintain a slight bend at the elbow to absorb the ball.

#### **3. Transition to Throw:**

- As you secure the ball, swing the arm into normal "L" throwing motion, but without coming up.
- To clear a path for the throw, pull back on your glove side shoulder to open the shoulders as you throw.

# Fielding a Ground Ball (Cont'd)

## Tips on Teaching:

- As with catching a thrown ball, the biggest obstacle to players using proper technique is fear of the ball.
- Break the whole action of fielding a ball into component parts and practice those until the player gets comfortable.
- Start by picking up stationary balls using proper mechanics and then move to softly rolled balls. Encourage players to focus on proper mechanics in an environment where they don't need to be afraid of a sharply hit ball.
- Repetition, repetition, repetition! The only way players will become skilled at this is by doing it. Practice of this skill should be part of every practice and pre-game warm up.

## Points of Emphasis:

- The vast majority of ground balls that are missed are because the balls went under the glove or off the fingertips of the glove. Encourage your players to get low and get the "back of the glove dirty".
- The next most common problem area is players attempting to field the ball off to the side or by their foot. Encourage your players to square up to the ball and catch it out front and in the center of their body.
- Another common problem is players bend at the waist instead of bending the knees and getting their hips down and head up.
- Also, make sure that the bare hand is above the glove with the palm up facing the oncoming ball. If the hand is palm-down, then the fingers are in a position vulnerable to getting jammed. The bare hand is there to protect the face on bad hops as much as it is to trap the ball in the glove.
- Back-hand attempts and fore-hand attempts should only be if the player can not get in front of the ball.



# Fielding a Ground Ball (Cont'd)

## Drills:

### 1. **“Soft Hands”** (To develop soft hands) *L1*

- Partners stand about 6-8 ft. apart without gloves.
- Partners roll the ball back and forth underhanded.
- They field the ball with bare hands in proper position, and gather the ball into their belly.
- The hips are down and the arms create a triangle.

### 2. **“Rollers”** (To focus on mechanics) *All Levels*

- Coach has a bucket of balls to the 3<sup>rd</sup> base side of the mound, and another empty bucket at 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- A line of players will be at shortstop, and a player at 1st base.
- The coach just rolls a ball to the 1<sup>st</sup> player at shortstop, who fields the ball and throws to 1<sup>st</sup>, using proper mechanics.
- The player at 1<sup>st</sup> catches the ball and just puts the ball in her bucket.
- The coach can vary the path and speed of the ball in a vary controlled way and get through many reps with the players very quickly.

### 3. **“Cross-Fire”** (Develop skills in a game-like situation) *All Levels*

- Players are in 2 lines, 1 at shortstop and the other at 2<sup>nd</sup> base position. One coach is between home and 1<sup>st</sup>, (outside the foul line), and another coach is between 3<sup>rd</sup> and home.
- The coaches hit ground balls to the players opposite them, 3 balls to each player in turn.
- The player fields the ball and throws it back to the coach. (A Player can be used as a receiver to catch the ball, and would be positioned near (out front) of the coach.
- After each player completes her turn, she moves to the back of the other line.
- Variation: A game can be made of this, by having the coaches hit the ground balls at precisely the same time. The players field the ball and get the ball back to the person receiving the ball as quickly as possible, competing to see which player can get the ball fielded and back in first, (scoring 1 pt for their team each time they succeed in beating the other team).

# Fielding Fly Balls & Pop-Ups

## **Fielding a Fly Ball – Basic Skills – L1: (Assumes right-handed player)**

- Move to the ball. First step should be back (drop step) to the side of the expected ball flight. As the player takes the drop step, hips should also turn.
- Players should run to the ball. Get in front of it. Then put your glove up.
- Players should catch the ball at nose or eye level looking over the top of the glove to track the ball.
- Ball is caught in “fingers-up” position (whenever possible), about head high, in front of the body.
- Two hands to the ball.
- Transition to throw using left – right- left “Crow Hop” (see “Throwing a ball section).

## **Fielding a Fly Ball – Intermediate to Advanced Skills – L2-3:**

- More advanced players will learn to move under the ball intentionally taking a position 2-3 steps in back of where they intend to catch it, then....
- Catch the ball moving forward at the last instant, and transitioning into their throwing position all in one motion.

## **Tips on Teaching:**

- Only confidence gained through practice will eliminate natural fear of the ball.
- Start easy with short soft tossed flies. Gradually increase distance as players develop confidence.
- Again, repetition, repetition, repetition! Confidence in the ability to catch a fly only comes with experience. The ability to judge a ball’s flight only comes with experience.

## **Points of Emphasis:**

- Inexperienced players often run to the ball with the glove extended. They can’t run as fast that way and should be coached to run to the spot and then put their glove up.
- Emphasize proper glove position. New players often try to catch all balls with a “basket” catch. Emphasize a fingers up glove position.

# Fielding Fly Balls & Pop-Ups (Cont'd)

## Drills:

1. **“Drop Step”** (Focus on that initial drop step) *L1-2*
  - Player stands facing coach about 30-40 ft. away.
  - Coach points left or right and player immediately “drop steps” and starts running in that direction angling away from the coach.
  - The coach tosses a ball in that direction, and the player runs under it and catches it, throws the ball back to the coach and returns to the end of the line.
  - As the players get proficient at this, gradually increase the distance players must run to the ball. Train your players to be able to run for the ball at top speed.
  
2. **“Wide Receiver”** (Focus on finding and tracking the ball) *L1-2*
  - Each player has a ball and forms a line with the coach at the head of the line.
  - The 1<sup>st</sup> player hands her ball to the coach and starts running away from the coach.
  - The coach calls left or right and at the same time tosses a ball in that direction.
  - The player finds the ball, tracks it, runs under it and catches.
  - Player keeps that ball and returns to line.

# Basic Defensive Position Responsibilities

## Note:

The responsibilities outlined below are very basic. Obviously there many possible game situations that would require variations of these, and they can't all be covered here. But teach your players, that "there are no spectators"...everyone has somewhere to go on every play. Coach them to think of their responsibilities in a sequence of "Ball, Base, Backup". Their 1<sup>st</sup> responsibility is always field the **ball**, next if not hit to them, do they need to cover a **base**, and lastly if neither of those, then who do they need to **back up**.

## Infielders:

- **1st Base**
  - ✓ Primary responsibility is to field any balls hit in her direction.
  - ✓ In bunt situations, her responsibility is to charge the bunt.
  - ✓ If the ball is not hit to her, and it is not a bunt, she immediately moves to cover 1<sup>st</sup> base (every time)
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Base**
  - ✓ Primary responsibility is to field any balls hit in her direction
  - ✓ If a ball is hit to the left side of the field the player moves to cover 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
  - ✓ If the ball is hit toward the 1<sup>st</sup> baseman, the player moves to cover 1<sup>st</sup> base or to back up the 1st baseman.
  - ✓ In bunt situations, her responsibility is to cover 1st.
  - ✓ If the ball is hit to right field, the player moves to a position to act as a cut-off and receive a throw from the outfielder.
- **3<sup>rd</sup> Base**
  - ✓ Primary responsibility is to field any balls hit in her direction
  - ✓ In bunt situations, her responsibility is to charge the bunt.
  - ✓ If ball is not hit to her, she immediately moves to cover 3rd base (every time)
- **Short-Stop**
  - ✓ Primary responsibility is to field any balls hit in her direction
  - ✓ If a ball is hit to the right side of the field the player moves to cover 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
  - ✓ If the ball is hit toward the 3rd baseman, the player moves to cover 3rd base or to back up the 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman.
  - ✓ On steals of 3<sup>rd</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Shortstop covers either 3<sup>rd</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>.
  - ✓ On bunt situations, the shortstop covers 3rd if there is a runner on 2<sup>nd</sup> base. She covers 2nd in all other situations.
  - ✓ If the ball is hit to left or center field, the player moves to a position to act as a cut-off and receive a throw from the outfielder

# Basic Defensive Position Responsibilities (Cont'd)

## Outfielders:

- **Left Field**
  - ✓ Primary responsibility is to field any balls hit in her direction
  - ✓ Backup balls hit to SS or 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
  - ✓ Backup balls hit to the Center fielder.
  - ✓ Backup pickoff throws from the Catcher to 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
  - ✓ If none of the above, move to backup throws to 2<sup>nd</sup> base or 3<sup>rd</sup> base, (anticipating where there will most likely be a play).
- **Center Field**
  - ✓ Primary responsibility is to field any balls hit in her direction
  - ✓ Backup balls hit to the Left or Right fielder.
  - ✓ Backup the shortstop on steals to 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
  - ✓ If none of the above, move to backup throws to 2<sup>nd</sup> base, (anticipating where there will most likely be a play).
- **Right Field**
  - ✓ Primary responsibility is to field any balls hit in her direction
  - ✓ Backup balls hit to 1st base.
  - ✓ Backup balls hit to the Center fielder.
  - ✓ Backup pickoff throws from the Catcher to 1st base.
  - ✓ Backup throws to 1st base.
  - ✓ Backup throws to 2<sup>nd</sup> base on singles to Left.

## Pitchers & Catchers:

- **Pitcher**
  - ✓ Primary responsibility is to pitch.
  - ✓ Field balls hit back to her or dribbled in front
  - ✓ Field bunts if back to her.
  - ✓ Must keep 1 foot in the circle in a coach-pitch situation.
- **Catcher**
  - ✓ Primary responsibility is to catch.
  - ✓ Field short balls dribbled in front of the plate.
  - ✓ Field bunts if right in front of the plate.

# Basic Defensive Position Responsibilities (Cont'd)

## Tips on Teaching:

1. The responsibilities at shortstop or 2<sup>nd</sup> base can be overwhelming. Simplify by telling the player that they basically move in the direction the ball is hit every time.

## Points of Emphasis:

2. Emphasize to all players that everyone has some place to go on every play. No spectators!

## Drills:

### 1. "Situations"

- Depending on how many players you have at practice, position players at most or all positions.
- Have 2 or 3 players act as runners and position those players near home plate, but off to the side.
- Have the pitcher pitch the ball to the catcher. (This is a timing mechanism for both runners and fielders)
- The coach is standing near home and hits another ball, in the air or on the ground anywhere on the field, and simultaneously a "runner" leaves home for 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- The defensive players in the field try to get the runner out.
- You are simulating a game, so everything should be at "game speed".
- You can set up any game situation. 0, 1, or 2 outs; runners on any bases, etc.
- If you have enough coaches, have a coach at 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> to coach the runners as well. You are practicing both defense and base running.

# Hitting

## Key Elements:

### 1. The Grip:

- ✓ Hands together on the bat
- ✓ Grip the bat on the pads at the base of the fingers
- ✓ Line up middle row of knuckles (door knocking) on top hand with the midpoint between 2 rows of big knuckles of bottom hand. (Index fingers should be pointing in the same direction forward.
- ✓ Firm and relaxed (not too tight)
- ✓ Wrists are flexible.

### 2. Stepping up to the Plate

- ✓ Check your distance from the plate
- ✓ Hold bat at the knob with the bottom hand
- ✓ Reach out with the bat and touch the far side of the plate

### 3. The “Box”

- ✓ A “box” formed by player’s chest, tricep, forearm and bat simulate a “box”. The “box” will be referred to numerous times.
- ✓ The “box” must be maintained until contact.
- ✓ The lead arm should maintain elbow above hand, hand above barrel of the bat throughout swing.

### 3. Loading:

- ✓ Loading just means that the player gets dynamic muscular tension in the legs and core muscles of the abdomen by getting into an athletic stance....some bend in the knees and at the waist (“**vertical load**”).
- ✓ From stance, body moves in four directions (north, south, east, west) i.e. stride, box back about three inches, torso tilted at waist and butt back)
  - **Negative Move:** Box loads straight back weight shifts slightly back to inside of back leg for power at stride.
  - **Stride foot** may or may not move forward. Stride should be less than six inches;
  - **Tilt at waist.** Weight should be on the balls of feet and evenly distributed;
  - **Butt back.** Butt back will put player in athletic stance and load up quads.
- ✓ Level eyes;
- ✓ Player should load on **EVERY** pitch.

# Hitting (Cont'd)

## Swing Components (PCR):

### 1. Posture

- ✓ Knees inside of feet;
- ✓ Weight equally distributed on the balls of each foot;
- ✓ Tilted at waist;
- ✓ Butt back;
- ✓ Large muscles of the legs and core with dynamic muscular tension (“vertical load”);
- ✓ Box maintained in proper position.

### 2. Connection

- ✓ Start with a slight negative move away from the pitcher; Weight shifts (slightly) to inside of back leg as arms (box) move slightly back.
- ✓ The stride or toe tap is a slight forward movement, returning the weight to a balanced position.
- ✓ Start turn by pushing off inner toe of back foot. Knee of back leg & back hip will move to middle of stance.
- ✓ While turning, front leg will become firm immediately before contact;
- ✓ Weight shifted to inside of front leg right before contact while remaining on balance.
- ✓ Turn torso “into” ball so that barrel rotates in same plane as body core;
- ✓ The box must stay together until released through contact to keep barrel connected to rotation.
- ✓ Front elbow is slightly lower than front shoulder, hands below elbow, barrel below hands at contact.

### 3. Rotation

- ✓ Using dynamic tension built in large muscle groups of legs and torso, core is turned into and through the pitch.
- ✓ The body rotates on the inside of the front leg.
- ✓ After contact, keep powerful rotation with full finish (top hand may come off the bat **after** contact) and finishing at front shoulder as bat finishes high above back.
- ✓ Front foot should remain somewhere between a fully closed position (perpendicular to the pitcher) or slightly open (never more than 45 degrees).



# Hitting (Cont'd)

## Tips on Teaching:

- **Basic Skills - L1** The most essential concept is that the swing itself is a *rotational* move. With new or young players, get them in the correct posture at stance and just teach them to turn into the swing. You might stay away from the “negative move” and “stride” aspects until they have learned to swing rotationally and in balance. Through the swing, the head should stay stationary. The tee drills are absolutely essential to teaching this swing (at all ages).
- **Intermediate Skills – L2** After a player gets comfortable with the basic rotational swing and can swing consistently in balance, then add the “negative move” and “stride” aspects of the overall swing. These moves are essential timing mechanisms that will become important as the player advances to more competitive levels. However, there is a certain linear motion with these parts which can throw a new player off track. The Negative Move and Stride are slightly linear, but as soon as the stride foot lands any linear motion stops against a firm front side and the swing itself is purely rotational.
- **Advanced Skills – L3** At more advanced levels, a player can use the swing described here and hit the ball with power anywhere. The outside pitch is driven to right as the contact point is more toward the back of the plate, a pitch down the middle is driven up the center, and an inside pitch is driven to left, as the contact point is more in front of the plate.
- **All Levels:** Don't rush too soon to hitting off live pitching or even a machine. Hitting from a tee is invaluable to getting these swing mechanics driven into muscle memory. Then move to soft toss or wiffle balls, etc. Work your way up to hitting a pitched ball. Kids will lose their mechanics as soon as they see a pitched ball if the mechanics have not been “drilled in”. Repetition, repetition, repetition will be needed for muscle memory.

## Points of Emphasis:

- The most common mistake new and young players make is dropping their hands as they begin the swing. Stressing keeping the “box” in tact helps overcome this tendency.
- Another common mistake is moving too far forward during a stride and getting the weight shifted out too far over the front foot at, and even before contact. This loses all power. This is why it is critical that a stride is only a stride to a balanced position against a firm front side, and the swing is rotational.
- Another common mistake is over or under tilting at the waist. The barrel should be below the “box” upon contact. Another common mistake is rising out of their vertical load or tilt. The player must maintain a tilt at the waist throughout the swing rotation.
- Another common mistake is the hands pushing forward out of the “box” before contact. The player must maintain the box through contact. The forearm and bat should be parallel to the shoulders upon contact.
- Another common mistake is the backside collapsing or weight on the back foot and heels. Push off inner big toe of back foot at the beginning of rotation.

# Hitting (Cont'd)

## Drills:

### 1. Hit Stick Drills: L1

- Using T, load with hit stick **behind** neck and hit wiffle off Tee. Tee should be placed at the middle of batter's stance.
- Using T, load with hit stick **across chest** and hit wiffle off Tee. Tee should be placed at front foot of load.

*This is a great starting point to learn the rotational concept. Key is to tilt, rotate torso into ball with front knee straightening immediately before stick contacts wiffle. Helps with shoulder plane and learning to turn core.*

### 2. One Handed Drills: L1-2

- Wiffle Bat – Using Tee, swing with only bottom hand on the bat, rest top hand on top of wrist, maintaining box to contact and finishing high. Use wiffle balls and a net.
- T- Ball Bat – Using Tee, swing with only bottom hand on the bat, rest top hand on top of wrist, maintaining box to contact and finishing high. (T-Ball bat should be no more than 16 – 17 oz.)
- You can also do this drill with wiffle balls and a soft toss method hitting into a net.

*Both bats create a sense of how the player is really hitting the ball, especially with the short bat. T-ball bat strengthens arm. Helps with maintaining the box and turning with box together while striking the ball.*

### 3. Posture and Swing Plane Recognition L1-2

Load, Tilt & Turn using tape strips on wall for correct posture and swing plane.

1. First Tape Mark = Tilt
2. Second Tape Mark = Tricep to Forearm; Also signifies target point
3. Third Tape Mark = Swing plane or barrel at contact

*Tape strips may be placed on wall. Also, may use bungie cords on nets or fence dugouts, etc. Repetition, repetition, repetition!*

### 4. Chair Drills: L1-2

- Using a Tee - Sit on chair (or bucket) with bat on shoulder, rise into loaded position and hit wiffle.
- Soft Toss - Same as above, but with wiffle being tossed from a 45-degree angle.

*Key is to keep in tilted position with butt back to load major muscles for forceful turn.*

# Hitting (Cont'd)

## 5. Stop Swing w/ Tee: L1-2

- Using Tee – Holding bat with box position, turn bat and core into ball and stop as quickly as possible following contact.
- Assess box- barrel relationship, weight shift onto front foot immediately before contact.

## 6. Long Tee Drill w/ Tee: L2-3

- Use a tee and real softballs of appropriate size to age group. Do not use a net.
- Have players use proper mechanics and just drive the ball out into open space, (use other players as shaggers).
- Focus on driving line drives with backspin. Reinforces swinging level and on plane.

## 7. Walk into Swing: L3

- Again, use a tee and real softballs, with or without a net.
- Have the player take a stance approx. 1 stride toward the catcher side of where they would normally line up to the tee.
- (For a right hander), have the player slide their right foot against their left, and then stride with their left and swing. (this may take a time or 2 to get lined up right).
- This drill reinforces a proper weight transfer while remaining balanced.

# Bunting

**Note:** Bunting is a “Level 2” skill. . Bunting is a next logical progression for players who have learned how to hit.

## **Bunting – Intermediate Skill – L2**

The following describes the basics of a “sacrifice” bunt, the most basic of several forms of bunting skills.

### **Stance:**

- The player first takes her normal batting stance., but more to the front of the box.
- From that stance, as the pitcher begins her motion, the player turns into a bunting stance. There are 2 basic bunting stances:
  - The player can move both feet so as to turn mostly square toward the pitcher, or
  - The player can simply pivot both feet so that they point generally in the direction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman (right hander) or in the direction of the shortstop, (left hander).
- In either case, the player crouches slightly, with hips and shoulders turned generally toward the pitcher and leans somewhat forward.
- The player slides her top hand part way up the bat and holds the bat out in front of her, (toward the pitcher). The bat is held at an angle throughout the bunt with the barrel held slightly higher.
- The top hand should be placed at about the place on the bat where the bat changes dimension. The fingers of the top hand should not wrap around the bat, but rather curl back to only be holding the bat on the side away from the ball.

### **Bunt:**

- As the ball approaches, the player positions the bat to let the ball hit the bat and drop to the ground out front. (The player should not make a motion to hit the ball with the bat....moving it into the ball). The action is like “catching” the ball with the bat.
- The player should start with the bat at the top of the strike zone, and only adjust down for pitches.
- Adjusting to the height of the pitch is done entirely with the knees, to lower the body in one piece, without dipping or changing the angle of the bat.
- The goal is to deaden the ball so that does not roll too far. Also a sacrifice bunt should be directed toward the pitcher, (the only player not charging).

**Note:** The logic of a sacrifice bunt is not to necessarily attempt to deceive or surprise the other team, so the player “squares around” early to be already in position when the pitch comes.

# Bunting (con't)

## Drag Bunting – Advanced Skill – L3

Unlike the Sacrifice bunt, the drag bunt is intended to surprise the opponent and to catch them off guard and out of position. The sacrifice is designed to move a runner; the drag bunt is an attempt by the batter to reach base. Drag bunting is done from the left side.

### **Stance:**

- The player first takes her normal batting stance, and in her customary position in the box.
- From that stance, as the pitcher begins her motion, the player turns to drag bunt the ball. Also unlike the sacrifice bunt, when drag bunting, the player waits as long as possible before initiating the action
- There are 2 variations of footwork to get into position to drag bunt. Either is acceptable. The player can use whichever works best for her.
  - The player can merely turn to place her left foot in the front corner of the batter's box.
  - The player can, 1st drop the right foot back slightly, and then make a cross over step with the left foot.
- In either case, the goal is to have the left foot land at about the instant she is making contact with the ball, in a starting to run motion.

### **Bunt:**

- The bat as held much as it is in a sacrifice...hand slides up the barrel, the barrel of the bat is held high.
- Since as the player is bunting the ball, she is also moving forward, the player has to make a special effort to not hit at the ball, but rather give with the ball to deaden it.
- Coach your player to try to make contact using the last 6 inches at the end of the bat. This will help deaden the ball. This is one time, you do not want to use the sweet spot of the bat.
- Coach your player to just touch the ball with the bat to knock it on the ground, hopefully not too far, drop the bat and take off running all in one motion. Coach her not to wait around to see where the ball goes.

# Bunting (con't)

## Points of Emphasis:

- The most common mistake players make when attempting either kind of bunt is to drop the head of the bat. This tends to result in popping the ball up or fouling it off.
- Another common mistake is hitting the ball too hard. The farther the ball goes from home plate, the easier it is on the defense. Just “catch” the ball with the bat.
- Also, in most cases, do not attempt to bunt down the line; this more often than not just results in a foul ball. Remember, the only defensive player not charging is the pitcher; direct the ball toward her, (softly).

## Drills:

### 1. “Target Bunt”

- Draw several concentric arcs foul line to foul line in the dirt out from home plate, about 3 ft apart. (1<sup>st</sup> arc 3 ft out, 2<sup>nd</sup> arc 6 ft out, etc.)
- Then assign point values to the space between the arcs. The 1st 3 ft may be 1 pt. , the next 3 ft may be 3 pts, the next might be 1 pt., and beyond that is 0. Also, any foul ball is 9.
- Then either bunting off a machine, or with a coach pitching, players take turns seeing how many points they can get say off of 10 pitches.
- You can vary this even further by dividing the arcs with 2 pie shaped cuts from home plate, and giving different point values to different sections.

# Base Running

## Basic Running Mechanics:

- Arm Action:
  - Elbows are bent at 90 degrees
  - Arms drive vigorously from chest down past hips
  - Arms pump straight ahead, (not across chest)
- Knees: lifted high to form 90 degree hip angle
- Feet: pointed straight ahead; running on balls of the feet
- Body Lean: is from the ankles not from the waist

## Home to First:

The player runs hard out of the batters box every time she hits the ball. As she gets about half way to 1<sup>st</sup>, she needs to pick up the 1<sup>st</sup> base coach who will give her 1 of 3 options:

1. **“Through the Bag”** (anytime a play at 1<sup>st</sup> is expected)
  - Player runs as fast as she can directly to 1<sup>st</sup> staying in the running lane.
  - Player touches the nearest part of the orange base and continues running for a couple of steps.
  - After running past the base, the player stops quickly and listens for instructions from the coach, (in case there is opportunity to advance).
2. **“Round the Bag”** (ball is in play, no play at 1<sup>st</sup> is expected, but it is unclear whether the player will be able to advance to 2<sup>nd</sup>)
  - As the Player nears 1<sup>st</sup>, she swings out slightly into foul territory.
  - So that she can make a sharp turn (without swinging wide) touching the inside corner of the white base.
  - She continues about 10 ft. toward first, coming to a stop in a crouched, balanced position ready to advance or go back and waiting for instruction from her coach.
3. **“Go Two”** (The opportunity is there to go all the way to 2<sup>nd</sup>)
  - Similar to above, player swings out slightly making a tight turn, touching the inside corner of the white bag and continues hard toward 2<sup>nd</sup>.

# Base Running (Cont'd)

## Going 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup>:

Similar to running to 1<sup>st</sup>, when the player is about half way to 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>, she should look to the 3<sup>rd</sup> base coach who will give her one of 3 options:

1. "Slide" (Discussed in next section)
2. "Round the Bag" (Same as above)
3. "Go Three, or Go Home"

## Going Home:

The only option is whether or not to slide. Player should slide to avoid a tag or to avoid a collision. She can listen to her 3<sup>rd</sup> base coach, but she is mostly on her own to make that decision.

## Leading Off:

- Players should place their left foot on the edge of the base facing the next base, and to the right corner of that edge.
- Their right foot should be alongside the base (for example to the right field side at 1<sup>st</sup> base).
- As the pitch is released, or as it nears home, (depending on division specific rule), they should push off aggressively with their left foot, using the base to push from.
- Take several aggressive steps, and stop only if the ball is not hit, or if instructed by the coach.
- Players should get in the habit of leading off aggressively on every pitch.

## Tips on Teaching:

- Make sure your players understand the rules concerning when they can advance and when they cannot.
- Use common clear commands from the base coaches, supported by clear, consistent signals, (they may not be able to hear you in the pandemonium of a game).

## Points of Emphasis:

- Emphasize for your players to be aggressive on the base paths. Do not assume that on a hit that they will only advance 1 base. Do not play "station to station".



# Base Running (Cont'd)

## Drills:

### 1. **“Home to First”** (focus on base running mechanics, options at first, and coach’s commands)

- Players line up at home. A coach takes up the first base coaching position.
- On the coaches command to “Go” each player in turn starts sprinting toward first.
- As the player gets half way to first, the coach gives one of 3 commands, “Through the Bag”, “Round the Bag” or “Go Two”
- The player responds to that command using proper technique.

### 2. **“Round the Bases Relay”**

- Players are divided into 2 equal teams, one in a line at home, and one in a line at 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- Coaches position themselves outside the base line, just past each base, (for example 1 coach would be positioned to the outfield side and to the 2<sup>nd</sup> base side of 1<sup>st</sup>, about 10 ft from the bag.)
- On the coaches command, the 1<sup>st</sup> player in each line begin running the bases, going all of the way around.
- When the 1<sup>st</sup> player completes circling the bases, she tags the next player in her line, etc. creating a relay race.
- The coaches are positioned to force the players to make good tight corners at each base.
- The team that has all of their players complete circling the bases first wins.

# Sliding (“Bent-Leg” Slide)

**Note:** Sliding is a Level 2 skill. Sliding should be taught to players who already have the basic skills.

## **Basic Mechanics:**

- Player runs directly toward the base without losing speed.
- She starts the slide approximately 10 ft. (2 or 3 steps) in front of the bag.
- The lead foot is extended, and the opposite leg is bent at a 45 degree angle and is tucked under the knee of the forward leg, (making a figure 4).
- The runner leans back, extends the arms out like an airplane and extends the lead foot toward the bag.
- The laces of the bottom foot face the base
- The top leg is bent slightly at the knee, with the kneecap facing up, and the foot a few inches off the ground. (Keeping the knee bent helps absorb the shock of hitting the base).

## **Tips on Teaching:**

- As with several other skills, teach this working backwards, starting with the players simply lying on the ground in the correct sliding position.
- You might teach the girls this skill first on wet grass in (very) old clothes.
- Do not attempt to teach these young players a “head-first” slide.

## **Points of Emphasis:**

- The runner must keep up the speed. There is no way to do this in a tentative or timid manner. This only increases chance of injury.
- A common mistake is new player first learning this skill tend to slide too late, and hit the base hard. When first learning, better to slide to early.
- The player can extend either leg depending on what feels natural, but given a choice, it is better to learn to extend the right leg, as this will help later in learning a “pop-up” slide, (but either is fine).
- Make sure that they pick up the front foot off the ground so they do not catch their cleats and potentially injure their ankle.

# Sliding (Cont'd)

## Drills:

1. **“Cardboard & Baby Powder”** (focus on first learning how to slide in a fun, non-threatening way)
  - Tell your players ahead of time that you are going to practice this and advise them to wear old clothes and soft soled athletic or running shoes, (not cleats)
  - Get a very large piece of cardboard free of any staples or anything rough that might injure the players
  - Sprinkle it liberally and frequently with baby powder, keeping it slippery.
  - Initially, just have the girls form a line and run one at a time, and slide freely on the cardboard, (using proper form).
  - Once they get used to it, put the cardboard up to a base for them to slide toward.
2. **“Slip & Slide”**
  - Same as above, but just use a “Slip ‘n Slide” instead of the cardboard.