



## **Berlin Youth Baseball – Defensive Awareness Drills**

**Goal of this document:** One of the most important aspects on a young baseball team is ensuring players are aware of what to do if the balls hit to them, and what to do when it's not hit to them. These drills help enforce what to do in some of the more common and critical defensive situations. Please note in all these drills, adjust based on age accordingly. For example, even though the drills calls for "hitting" groundballs, it may be simpler or better suited to "roll" groundballs instead.

### **Preventing Runs, Minimizing the Damage:**

With young teams, giving up one or two runs an inning is not necessarily a bad thing. It's those innings where you give up 5 or 10 runs that you want to avoid. These are a few drills you can work on to try to reduce the risk of a damaging inning and ensure things don't get out of hand.

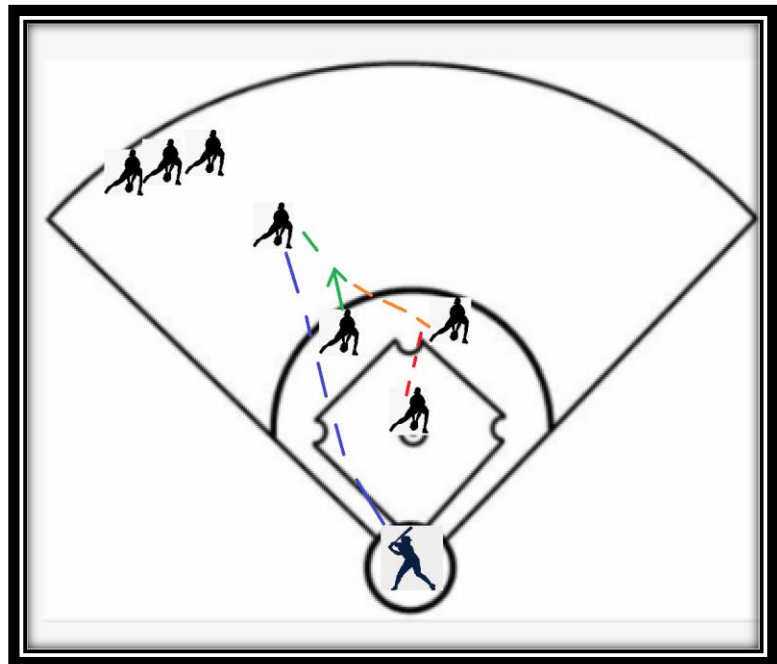
### **Ending a play, "Get the Ball to the Pitcher":**

With a very young team, as a coach one of the most important things you can teach them is how to end a play and stop the damage. If the other team just got a hit, the last thing you want your team to do is make a bad throw trying to get a runner advancing to the next base, and allow for more runners to score. (For example: on a young team, the opponent has a runner on 2<sup>nd</sup>, they get base hit to RF, and your right fielder tries to launch the ball all the way to home; it doesn't make it there and the hitter keeps running to second, your team tosses again to 2B but it ends up in the outfield and the batter has advanced to third & eventually home. You'd be in a much better situation if you'd just taught your team to always return it to the pitcher, therefore the RF should've hit his cutoff man, the cutoff man gets it to the pitcher, and the batter stops running. You may have given up one run, but on a young team, trading a single run for keeping the runner at first is usually a really good trade.

**DRILL - Wild Throw:** Have your defense setup in their normal positions. Have the coach stand at the pitcher's mound with the pitcher. The coach takes the ball and randomly throws a "wild throw" in any direction (fair ball, foul ball, to the fence, doesn't matter as long as it's NOT directly at a player). The goal of the team is to get the ball back to the pitcher as soon as possible. This is a high energy drill, boys working together, lots of yelling to each other of what to do and where to throw it. If it's in the outfield, this may involve hitting the cutoff. If it's down the 3<sup>rd</sup> base line, the 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman may have to throw it to the shortstop who then returns it to the pitcher. It's a race against time, as quickly as possible get it back to the pitcher. The pitcher should stay at or around the mound, and be yelling & waving his hand for the ball.

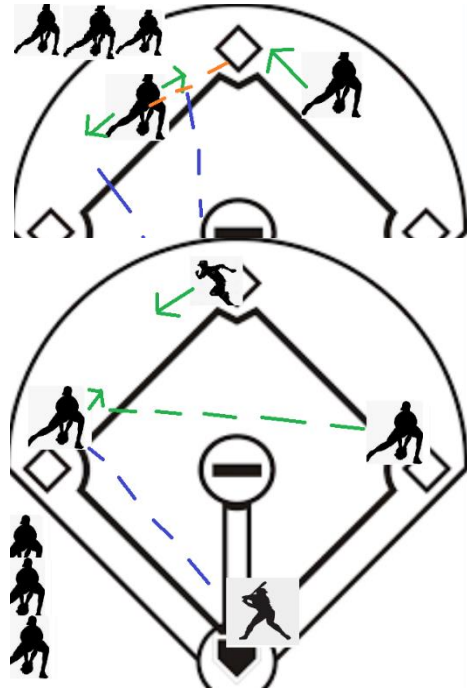


**DRILL – Cutoffs:** At the younger ages, if a ball is hit to the outfield it's often extra bases, so your best case scenario is to hold it to a single and stop any other runners from advancing. Your best way to do that is to get the ball back to the pitcher. Your outfielders may watch professional baseball and think they can toss the ball all the way home, or straight to the pitcher, most of the time that will just lead to an errant throw and runners advancing. You thus should stress especially at the youngest ages that the ONLY place you want your outfielders to throw is to their cutoff man. The cutoff man in left and center field is usually the shortstop, and the cutoff in right field will be the second baseman. You've now reduced risk by having your outfielder make a simple short throw to the cutoff man, who then makes a short throw to the whomever is covering second base, who then makes another short throw to the pitcher, the umpire will then call timeout and the runners will stop advancing. For this drill, have a line of left fielders who stand in line, whomever is at the front of the line fields first. You'll also want a SS, a 2B, as well as a pitcher, and the coach at home to hit



the balls. The coach will cycle through each left fielder, hitting a base hit to left field. The left fielder should field the ball, the SS should go out into the grass and receive the cutoff throw, then throw it to 2B, who returns it to the pitcher. The pitcher then returns the ball to the coach.

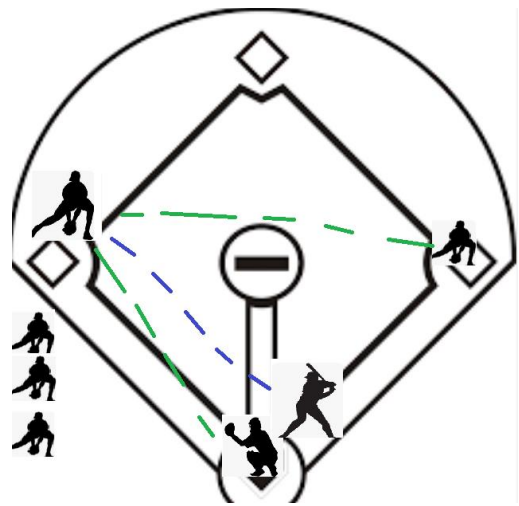
**DRILL – Short Throw Flips:** One common mistake young players make is applying the same force behind a long throw and a short throw, for example if the shortstop fields a groundball and needs to make a short throw to the second baseman, often the young shortstop will fire the ball too hard, the 2B misses it, and the ball ends up in right field. Thus, it's important to teach youth how to adjust their throw when it's short, and in most cases if the player is close enough, they should do an under-hand flip instead of an overhand throw. For this drill you simply need a line of shortstops and one shortstop that will start the drill. You'll also need a 2B and a coach hitting the grounders. The coach will cycle through each shortstop and hit into 1 of these 2 situations 1.) Grounder to the 2B side of the SS, since it is going to be a short throw, the SS underhand flips it to the second baseman. 2.) Grounder to the 3B side of SS, since it's going to be a farther throw, it's an overhand hard throw to 2B. Then the ball is returned to the coach.



**DRILL – Look the runner back:** A more advanced topic for the older boys is trying to prevent an un-forced lead runner from advancing, while still getting the runner out at first. For example, if there is a runner to 2B, and a groundball to 3B, the third baseman should field the ball, glance/stare at the runner on 2B for a second (in order to delay their chance of running), then throw the ball to first to get the force out. On an older mature team, that is capable of throwing across field without making wild throws, as the third baseman is throwing the ball, the SS should come in behind and cover third base so that if the runner advances, the first baseman can immediately fire the ball back to the SS who tags the runner. That is not part of the drill diagrammed here, but could easily be added by placing a SS and having the runner try to advance. The simpler drill to start with though, requires a line of third baseman waiting for their turn, a third baseman to start the drill, a runner at 2B, a first baseman, and a coach hitting the groundball. The coach will cycle through each third baseman hitting them a ground ball. Each play is the same, the third baseman fields the ball, turns his body towards second

glances/stares at the runner and counts out loud “1, 2” then turns his body and throws to first. In this simple version of the drill, the runner should NOT advance.

**DRILL – Winning run at Third:** One situation that doesn’t happen often, but is very important in the heat of a game, can lead to disappointment and upset kids, coaches, and parents, and is often not practiced is the when there is a winning runner on third and less than 2 outs. A common mistake is that your defense will be unfamiliar with this situation, and instead of throwing home to get that out, they may follow through on their standard throw to first base, not realizing that by doing so they just ended the game. Please note, this situation can also arise in a “run-rule”



situation, where for example in a 10-run rule game, the “10<sup>th</sup>” run is a 3<sup>rd</sup> base. Please also note for older teams with a more advanced skillset, there may be a situation where you have 1 out, runner on 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, and you can try to turn a double-play to end the inning, but that is not covered in this drill. For this drill, explain to the team that the “winning run” is on third base. Remind them that if there is 2 outs, “just get the out” because the inning will be over. Then remind them that if there are less than 2 outs we must throw home and tag the runner out or else the game is over. For this drill you’ll want a line of third basemen and a third baseman ready to start the drill. You’ll also need a catcher, 1B, and coach hitting the groundballs. The coach will cycle through each third baseman hitting a grounder, but before doing so yelling out 1 of 2 scenarios 1.) Coach yells “2 outs, winning runner on third” in which case the 3B fields the ball and throws to first to end the inning. 2.) Coach yells “1 out, winning runner on third” in which case the 3B fields the ball and throws to home, the catcher then puts the glove down to be ready for a tag.