



Berlin Youth Baseball – Infield Defense

Goal of this document: This document shares ideas to help youth practice their infield skills, such as playing 2B, SS, or 3B, fielding groundballs, making a throw to first base, or turning a double play.

Before you start working with your youth on the infielder drills below, it's important to cover some of the more fundamental aspects of defense and throwing with your youth. We will cover these quickly at the beginning of this infielder clinic. For example:

- **Proper grip of the baseball:** Covered in the fundamental throwing clinic drills
- **Proper throw to first:** Covered in the throwing accuracy clinic drills
- **The 3 “B’s” (ball-base-backup):** Covered in the Defensive Awareness drills
- **Must tag vs Force Out:** Covered in the Defensive Awareness drills
- **Slow ball (charge it):** Covered in the “Getting An Out” drills sheet online
- **Hard hit ball (first step back):** Covered in the Fielding Fundamentals drill
- **Short Throw Flips vs Hard Throw:** Covered in the “Preventing Runs” drills

One topic to cover quickly is **glove size**. Especially at a young age, and especially with infielders, you may run into issues where youth have too big of a glove. In the infield, at this age, it's pretty rare to have too small of a glove, but very common for the youth to show up with a glove that's so big they can't close it to keep the ball in or can't quickly find the ball after catching it. Make sure to mention glove size issues to the parents and consider bringing extra or lost-and-found type gloves to practice so youth can try them.

Once we cover the fundamentals above, we will move into drills that are more specific to a fielding infielder, e.g. the player at the following positions: 2B, SS, or 3B.

Soft Hands drill (bare-handed): As youth are learning to field ground balls, it is important they have “soft hands”. What is meant by this is that they are gently moving their hands/glove back towards their body at the ball is getting to them. The opposite, or poor fielding, would be “brick hands”, where the hands/glove stay still and the ball is then more inclined to bounce right back out of the glove. This can be done in partners, in the early stages can involve a tennis ball, and the goal is for the partners to roll underhand ground balls to each other, each time the fielder will scoop it up with only 1 hand, bare-handed, with their glove hand. It requires that glove hand to be soft and move ever so slightly back towards the body upon fielding. The more drills you can do bare-handed, the better your youth will be once they actually put the glove on. The longer and more repetitions your youth get on a drill like this, the more they will improve. For example, challenge them to get 100 in a row without an error.



Backhand quick flip: This next drill involves a coach holding 2 baseballs, a player with their glove on their knees in a backhand position, and the coach rolling one ball on the ground to the player's backhand, as the player fields it, they scoop it up with their glove and flip it back to coach using their glove (they DO NOT use their barehand at all). As they're flipping that ball back, the coach is rolling the second ball. This cycle continues in repetition for a many iterations.



Backhand / forehand quick flip: This next drill is the same as above, except the youth player has their knees facing the coach, the coach holds 2 baseballs, and rolls one to the forehand, the player scoops up the ball and flips it with the glove back to the coach (they don't use their throwing hand at all), as they're flipping it with the glove, coach rolls the 2nd bal, and this cycle continues for several iterations.



Proper infield "athletic position": In order to get your player ready for a ground ball in the infield, they need to focus on the following

- 1.) **Wide Base** – legs apart so if you push them they don't fall over
- 2.) **Butt Down/Eyes up** – butt down so they are close to the ground, but eyes up looking forward. One common flaw is youth players will have is standing up and having their eyes facing down to the dirt. We want them to have a good sight-line and that starts with butt down.
- 3.) **Both Hands in Front** – by keeping your hands out in front, away from your body, it gives the youth the flexibility to adjust to bad bounces. Bad bounces will be very common on youth fields, so this is an important step to work on with them.



This is similar to the soft hands above, with partners in close proximity to each other, except now they put their gloves and roll each other grounds balls, and the coach is walking around re-enforcing and ensuring players are following the proper athletic position mentioned above. Upon catching the ball, there is no overhand/hard-throw, instead, they are simply underhand rolling a groundball back to their partner. Again try to set a goal for your players of getting 100 in a row without a single error.

Infield paddles: Another drill that helps promote soft hands is using an infield paddle (the same thing as a karate sparring pad). If you have this tool, line the youth up, have them put on the paddle, then roll them groundballs that they must field (with soft hands, using their throwing hand to support the catch), then throw the ball back to the coach and repeat.



Reaction ball: This drill is done, if you have one, with a reaction ball. These balls are not round, and thus have more of an unpredictable hop. You can do similar drills where you have players in line and a coach rolling this ball, you can start bare-handed and the youth is working on getting in front of the ball regardless of the hop. It is not expected that they catch the ball each time, but that they get in front of it and knock it down. Once they've done well with their bare-hands you can do the same drill where they put their fielding glove on.



Triangle Drill: This drill is about getting lots of infield repetition in a closed confined space. You can think of this has a short throw from 2B to first. You start with a youth at a close by first base, a coach ready to roll a ground ball, a youth as the fielder, and a line of youth behind that fielder waiting their turn. The coach rolls a ground ball, the fielder in their athletic position fields the groundball and throws an easy throw to first base. The first baseman flips the ball to coach and then the first baseman joins the line of youth waiting their turn. The youth that fielded the ball, follows their throw to first and becomes the new first baseman. This cycle repeats going through the line getting everyone multiple turns.

