

## OUTFIELD DRILLS

The following is a progression of drills that can be used for kids playing the outfield and drills to help reinforce good habits and team play:

### Catching Fly Balls

**Stationary** – Starting with the basic catch, Coach stands behind second base on the edge of the outfield and fly balls to players 25 feet away that allow them to remain stationary. This will allow them to focus on the fundamentals of catching the ball with their glove above and out in front of their head (eyes), securing the ball with 2 hands, and catching the ball with the Glove-hand foot in front of them so that they are ready to throw.

<For younger ages keep the throw lower, and use soft-core or tennis ball, at that age most kids are just trying to get over the *fear* of catching>

**\*Progression\*** You can add in a throw back to coach, to teach them the importance of catching, securing, transferring, and having their feet in the right position to transition into an immediate throw back into the infield. Out fielders can practice their crow hop by driving their back leg knee up and through towards their target to generate momentum.

**\*Challenge\*** *“Turn Around”* Drill. Same drill as above, but now the player starts facing away from the coach (facing the outfield fence). S the Coach throws the ball, he yells “Turn” and the field quickly turns and must find the ball in the air that is slightly off to his left, right, in front or slightly back. He must make the adjustment and catch the ball in the same proper position as above.

**\* Team Drill 1\*** (Emphasize Communication) - Add a player to either side of the Coach to mimic infielders protecting a base. As you face the outfielder, the player to your right is second basemen, and the player to your left is the third baseman. As the ball is in the air call out repeatedly “TWO, TWO, TWO”, or “THREE, THREE, THREE”, to teach the outfielder to listen and then react by throwing to the proper baseman. The baseman can practice proper form of straddling the base to receiving the throw, and applying the tag at the feet n front of the base for an on coming runner.

**\*Team Drill 2\*** (Emphasize Communication) Add a second Out-Fielder, and throw fly-balls right in the middle of them. They must now communicate with each other to determine who is going to catch the ball. Your team should come up with specific words that are used in this situation. Keep in mind that communication is a 2 way street, both players should be talking, so you should have 2 words that are distinctly audibly different than each other (for example “YOU” and “ME”). The person catching the ball should declare “ME” and in a commanding fashion move into position to catch it, the person who is not should be responding “YOU” repeatedly to let the other know that he understands, and then get in a back up position in case the first fielder drops it. Emphasis here on hustle, neither player should be standing still.

**\*COMBINATION\*** Add Team Drill #1 and #2 from above together, and you will be engaging 4 players per throw. Rotate players through each throw. As players have mastered the key techniques to the catch, throw, footwork, and communication, you can gradually expand this to the full field and a live hit off the bat.

**Short Drop Back Catch** – Start in the same position as above with Coach throwing to a single player. However, now make the catch more challenging by throwing deeper than the outfielder and off to his left or right. The emphasis here is that the Out Fielder determines where he is going to catch the ball, and then sprints to that spot and gets squared up and in the same proper position as above to catch, secure and throw the ball back into the infield.

**On the Run** – Coach now plays Quarterback throwing deep posts and fades to either side of the Outfielder deeper over their head, forcing them to catch on the run. Again, the emphasis here is that the Fielder is sprinting to the reception point and extending his glove in the final to strides.

**\*Variety\*** There are several ways to make this drill fun and dynamic, while still always emphasizing good technique:

- > Fly ball over the throwing shoulder (running to the left for a right handed thrower), player makes catch with glove palm facing them
- > Fly Ball over the glove shoulder, player makes catch with palm of glove facing out and away to maximize glove area to catch the ball.
- > Fly ball straight over their head, open to glove hand and spring straight back, trying to create an angle that will allow them to catch it over their throwing shoulder with glove palm facing them.
- > Wheel route – Out fielder starts running deep in one direction at 45 degrees, then with a pump fake have them wheel (turn away from batter) to run 45 degrees in the other direction and then throw it deep. This teaches them to make up lost ground if they misjudge a fly ball off the bat. Some will have the tendency to stop and turn around toward the batter, which is considerably slower. Repeat until they do it correct.
- > Short or deep – Like a QB to a receiver, start the fielder running 10 yards away from you, and then break to their throwing hand side. As they break throw a fly ball either deep or short, they must find it and make the adjustment in stride in order to get it. Keep the pace going by having the next player start once you release the ball.
- > “Buzz the Tower” – Split the team half in left field and half in right, place to Coaches as throwers in center creating a straight path to run between the 3 positions. A player from each side runs at and past Coach, and Coach releases a fly ball over their shoulder as they pass. Upon catching the player then goes to the end of the other line. This creates a continuous looping drill of Fly-By action!
- >”Zig Zag” Drill - Fielder starts in front of Coach in his out field stance, on go, Coach throws a fly ball out over the right shoulder. Upon Catching the fielder tosses the ball aside and then wheels to the left, and Coach throws another ball deeper out to the left, catch, discard second ball then repeat to the right, and one more to the left. 4 throws, 4 catches while Zig Zagging.

- > “Shoestring Drill” Player starts in Center and runs towards Coach standing behind 2<sup>nd</sup> base. Before the player reaches the infield, Coach tosses a ball short out in front of him (can be out and to the left or right), so that the on coming player must reach out and extend to catch it.
- > “Hero” Drill - One at a time throw a fly ball for a player that they must run for. Throw it just out of the reach of where you think they could catch it. While approaching the ball, the player must decide whether to dive all out for it, or pull up and cut it off. The wrong play in this drill is for a player to dive for it and let it get by them. They will learn that sometimes the real “Hero” makes the right play and cuts-it off

**\*Make it FUN with Competition\***, any of the above drills can be made fun, by making them a competition. Simply by saying First Team to 10, or who can do the most in a row, or giving Olympic style scores for perfect catches, you can reinforce the positive aspects of competing and doing things the right way. For instance, a catch that is done with the wrong technique (lucky) would not score a point.

**\*Combination\* Hitting and Out Field play**– Now that you have run through all the scenarios and difference style of catches, you can and should incorporate live hits off the bat, since judging the depth and flight of a ball hit off a bat is key to the success of an outfielder. This can be done by Coaches, or you can incorporate player hitting into the drill by throwing soft toss to each player from the outfield foul line, and allow Players to take turns fielding the hits.

### **Out Field Throws**

As mentioned above a good throw starts with catching the ball in the proper position, in front on the throwing hand side with the glove-hand leg in front. The difference between infield and outfield, is that the outfielder needs to create much more momentum towards his target to make the longer distance. This is done by the crow hop, which is where he take an exaggerated knee lift with his throwing-hand leg, bringing it high and in front, pulling him towards the target, then getting sideways with one more with the glove-hand to get sides ways. Finish with a good follow through taking 2 more steps towards the target (sometimes even falling forward)

### **Throwing Games:**

Distance Throw – Standing at home plate, aiming between the right field foul line and the out of play fence, have a competition to see who can throw the ball the farthest while staying within the boundaries (Similar to the Javelin in the Olympics). The lesson is that simply throwing far is no good without accuracy.

Variations:

- >Make the non winning kids have to sprint down and back to collect the balls, while the winner rests.
- >Knock out style – Farthest throw advances, everyone else must throw back towards home plate from where there ball landed, if they can’t make it back, they are knocked out.
- >Target Practice - Place large items like trash cans in the distance as targets for bonus points or safety if you hit them.

>Handicap the competition after a few rounds by allowing weaker throwers to throw from further down the first base line past home plate, so the strongest throwers don't always win, but all are encouraged and challenged to improve on their last throw.

>Strike at home – Flip the competition so players are standing on the edge of the outfield grass behind second base. Have a “pitching” competition to see who can make the most accurate throw by hitting a target (fence, screen, trash can) set up at home plate.

**Real Game Situations:**

**Do-or-Die** – Set up players in Center field and have your catchers man home plate. Hit line drives into the outfield that land in front of the outfielder. Fielder must scoop the ball on the run, and make a strong accurate throw to home plate in time. This frill teaches player to attack the ball when a runner is trying to score. Make it a game by placing runners between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. Once the ball is hit, they can try to score, can the Center fielder and Catcher make the connection at the plate in time? (Avoid sliding or any contact at home in this drill, it is just meant to simulate the tempo of the game, base runner can just run through or behind home plate like a finish line).