

Baserunning Practice

First to Third Game/Drill

Goal: To help baserunners develop a sense of when they should try to advance from first to third on a base hit and provide an opportunity for the defense to work on cutoffs and relays.

Setup: Put an entire defensive lineup in the field. The rest of the players on the team will serve as baserunners at first (see figure 9.5).

Description: Have a pitcher either throw a pitch or simulate a throwing motion to home. The coach hits balls out of his hand, re-creating singles, balls hit in the gap, fly balls that runners should go halfway on, and bloopers. The ultimate goal of the runner is to make it from first to third base on a ball that drops. However, the most important goal is to read the situation and run the bases correctly. Divide the runners up into teams, rotating them every so often with fielders to make sure that they get the same amount of chances on the bases. Award one point to a team when a runner handles a situation correctly and two points for runners who read the situation correctly and advance to third base.

To make the game easier for runners, do the following:

- Hit balls between the outfielders.

To make the game easier for fielders, do the following:

- Hit balls straight at the outfielders.

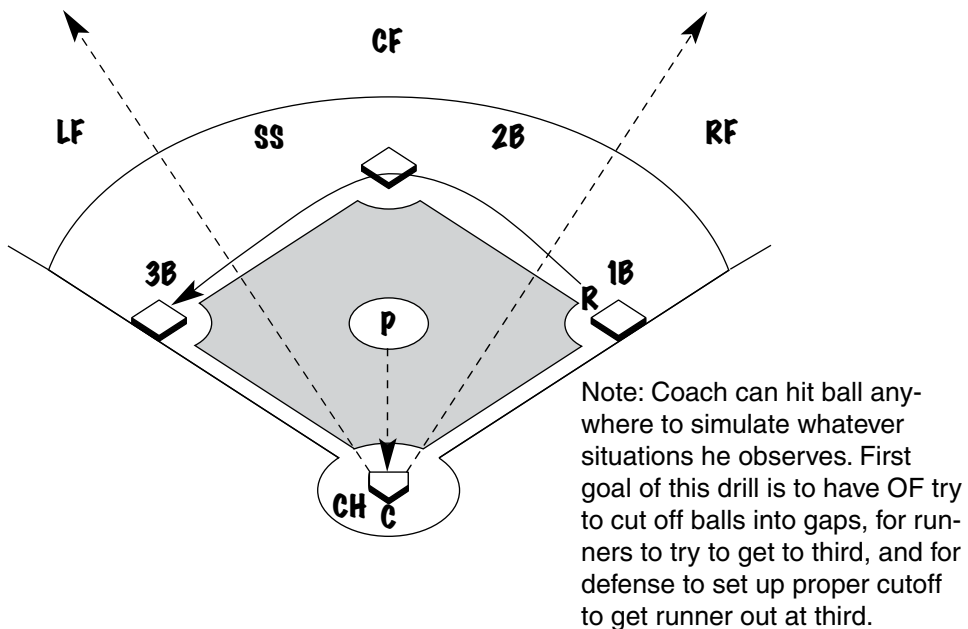


Figure 9.5 First to Third Game/Drill.

To make the game harder for runners, do the following:

- Bring the outfielders closer in, and hit balls more directly toward them.

To make the game harder for fielders, do the following:

- Add a runner at home plate who will act as the batter. Award a bonus point to the team whose runner starts at home if he or she advances to second base on the play.

Multitasking: Other team fundamentals can be practiced during this drill. Pitchers can work on holding runners close and making it harder for them to get a jump and take the extra base. Outfielders can practice fielding basic ground balls and fly balls, throwing after the catch, throwing quickly and accurately to the cutoff and relay people, and throwing to the proper base. Remember that a routine ball that is fielded or one that is cut off in the gap by an outfielder is thrown to a cutoff player to keep trailing runners from advancing extra bases. If a ball gets through an outfielder so that the fielder can't throw the ball all the way to the base where the lead runner is heading, a relay situation arises. The player who was the cutoff player needs to get out farther to assist the outfielder in getting the ball to the proper base. The other middle infielder should set up as a trailer, about 10 feet behind the relay person. If a throw is low or high to the relay, he or she should let it go to the trailer. The third baseman and catcher should communicate about where the final throw should go, and the first baseman should make sure that second base is covered.

Also remember that on defense situations exist in which a runner is on first and the throw should come into second base. For example, if the tying run is at bat with a runner on second and there is a base hit to the outfield, the cutoff should be set up to second instead of home. If the cutoff is set up for home and the throw is errant, the tying run can advance into scoring position. The defense would much rather prevent that runner from getting into scoring position and keep the double play in order.

Defensive Tactics and Strategies

Effective team defense starts with teaching players about correct straightaway positioning, how to provide backups, the difference between cutoffs and relays, proper execution of cutoffs and relays, and how to complete specific defensive plays. Remember that all of your players may not understand baseball terminology, so take extra time to explain exactly what you mean the first time.

Positioning

Positioning is a primary concern of any team defense. In baseball, it's not as simple as telling your players, "If your opponent does *this*, you do *that*." Instead, you'll have to base your positioning instructions on the hitter's preferred batting side, your pitcher's abilities, the game situation, and how the batter reacts to pitched balls.