



Thrown Fly Balls

Objective

To learn to catch fly balls with two hands above the head in a controlled environment

Setup

A bucket of balls and a coach to throw balls to players; soft or sponge rubber balls for younger players

Execution

To prevent injury and embarrassment, players must be comfortable catching fly balls properly before fly balls are hit to them. The proper way to catch a fly ball is with two hands above the head so that eyes can follow the ball into the glove. The simplest way to teach proper execution is to throw fly balls to players and force them to do it correctly. Start with short, easy tosses and then adjust the height of throws to the skill and comfort level of players. You can start younger players out with soft baseballs or sponge rubber balls to avoid injury and build confidence. You can turn this drill into an elimination contest for the youngest players. Stress getting to the spot where the ball is coming down and catching with two hands above the head.



(continued)

Adapted, by permission, from Ripken, 2007, *Coaching Youth Baseball the Ripken Way* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics).



Thrown Fly Balls *(continued)*

Make It Fun

This can be turned into an elimination contest with gloves for the youngest players and without gloves using softer balls for older players.



Coaching Keys

Players who regularly miss fly balls are most likely not watching the ball and should perform the drill again and again, attempting to catch the ball with two hands above the head so that they can see the ball travel all the way into the glove. Many players catch fly balls while backpedaling or moving away from the infield. Try to get them to learn to catch the ball while moving slightly forward when executing this drill.



Thrown or Machine Ground Balls

Objective

To learn how to field ground balls properly in a controlled environment

Setup

A bucket of balls, a pitching machine (optional), a coach to feed machine or throw balls

Execution

Like infielders, outfielders should field a ground ball with a wide base, the butt down, and the hands out in front of the body. Get wide by stepping toward home with glove-side leg forward and glove in front of that foot. Players should get comfortable with proper fundamentals before fielding hit balls. It's okay to use a pitching machine for outfield ground balls right from the start. Roll or feed players ground balls one at a time. Have them get to the spot quickly, get under control, field properly, generate momentum toward the coach, and throw. Don't allow players to walk or run through ground balls. They need to slow down and get under control to field properly.



Coaching Keys

Young outfielders have a tendency to “run through” ground balls. That is, they try to get to the spot quickly and then try to field the ball while still running at or near full speed. Remember that their main goal is to field the ball quickly and throw it to the proper cutoff or relay person to prevent baserunners from advancing. Thus, fielding the ball cleanly is the most important responsibility. Players should come to almost a complete stop if they have to so that they can be sure to field the ball cleanly.





Crossover Step Drill

Objective

To develop a fundamentally sound crossover step

Setup

A bucket of balls and a coach to throw them

Execution

The crossover step (pivot one foot while crossing the other one over in the direction of the ball or the next base) is the most efficient way to move laterally on the baseball field. The crossover is an important technique for all fielders and baserunners. Outfielders line up, each with a ball. The first outfielder steps forward, tosses the ball to the coach, and assumes a ready position. The coach tells the player which way to go ahead of time. The player crosses over in that direction, then the coach tosses ball so it can be caught with two hands over the head. The player should concentrate on crossing over correctly until comfortable doing so. The coach should tell players which direction they'll be going ahead of time until they master the step. Then mix it up at will.

Make It Fun

This drill is a lot of fun to begin with. Make it more fun by turning it into an elimination game, with players who perform the tasks correctly and catch the ball staying alive.



Coaching Keys

As with Pass Patterns, stop this drill and start over if the player performs the crossover step incorrectly. The goal of this drill is to force the player to get to the spot quickly and catch the ball with two hands over the head. More difficult over-the-shoulder catches are practiced using the Pass Pattern Drill.

(continued)



Crossover Step Drill (continued)



a



b

Adapted, by permission, from Ripken, 2007, *Coaching Youth Baseball the Ripken Way* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics).



Communication Drill

Objective

To understand the importance and mechanics of proper communication in the outfield

Setup

A bucket of baseballs, a coach to throw fly balls, soft or sponge rubber balls for younger players (optional), pitching machines (optional), a player to serve as a cutoff for throws (optional)

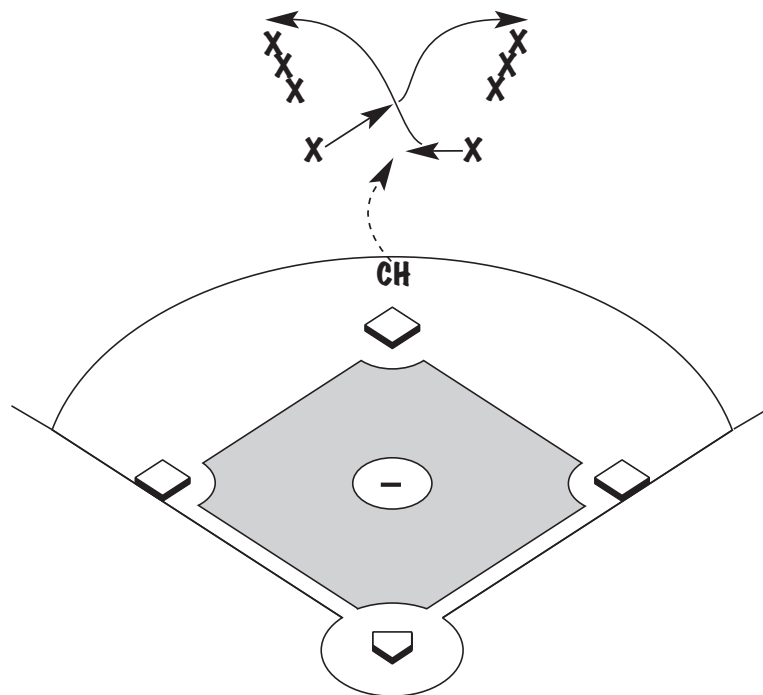
Execution

Outfielders form two lines at least 20 feet apart. The first players in each line step forward. The coach throws fly balls in between the two fielders, who must communicate and make the play. The player fielding the ball yells, "I got it!" at least three times. The other player then backs up the other player. The player who catches the ball should deliver a strong, accurate throw to the coach or cutoff player (a player who rotates out of the drill). For younger players, use soft baseballs, sponge rubber balls, or tennis balls. Use pitching machines to throw higher fly balls to more advanced players, ensuring the ball will reach about the same height and distance each time.



Coaching Keys

The age-old outfield communication problem arises when two players call for the ball at the same time. Teach players that if there's any uncertainty as to who will make the catch, they should continue to call for the ball. If two players call for the ball at the same time and then one continues to call for it, that player should make the play. As players get older, this drill can be done by designating one player as the centerfielder, who has priority over any ball that he or she calls. In this format a third player can be added to simulate a game situation in which there are three outfielders. Again, the centerfielder is the quarterback and should call for any ball that he or she can easily get to.





Drop Step Drill

Objective

To develop a fundamentally sound drop step

Setup

A bucket of balls and a coach to throw them

Execution

This drill is much like the drill for the crossover step but a bit more advanced. Players line up. The first player steps forward, tosses the ball to the coach, and assumes ready position. The coach says “Go!” and the player performs a drop step (drop one foot back, turn body, and cross the other foot over in the direction of the ball). The coach throws the ball directly over the player’s head, high and close enough that he or she can catch it with two hands above the head.

Make It Fun

This drill is a lot of fun to begin with. Make it more fun by turning it into an elimination game, with players who perform the tasks correctly and catch the ball staying alive.



Coaching Keys

Have players take time to get footwork correct before tossing. As with Pass Patterns, stop this drill and start over if players do the drop step incorrectly. The goal of this drill is to force the player to get to the spot quickly and catch the ball with two hands over the head. More difficult over-the-shoulder catches are practiced using Pass Patterns.

(continued)

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Drop Step Drill (continued)





Pass Patterns

Objective

To develop proper crossover steps and drop steps and learn to catch fly balls on the run

Setup

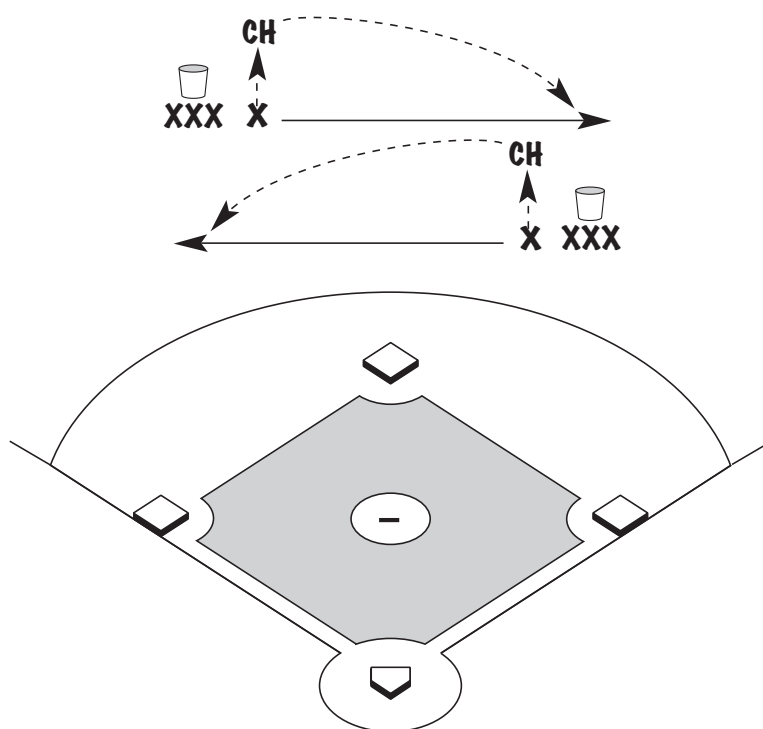
A bucket of balls, a coach to throw "passes"

Execution

A coach or player (this can be long toss for pitchers) serves as quarterback. The fielding player tosses the ball to the quarterback and then uses a crossover or drop step in the appropriate direction before running a "pass pattern." The quarterback throws the ball high enough for the "receiver" to run under the ball and make a one-handed, over-the-shoulder catch. Have the player start over if the initial step is not executed correctly.

Make It Fun

This drill is a lot of fun to begin with. Make it more fun by turning it into an elimination game, with players who perform the tasks correctly and catch the ball staying alive.



(continued)



Pass Patterns (continued)





Fence Drill

Objective

To learn the importance of field awareness and how to pursue fly balls hit near the outfield fence

Setup

A bucket of balls and a coach to throw them

Execution

This drill teaches outfielders to be aware of their surroundings. The activity is not intended to practice robbing home runs, but that element can be added for fun. Each player gets in line with a ball. The first player tosses the ball to the coach, who throws a fly ball that will land on the warning track. The player races back, feels for the fence with his or her bare hand, and then catches the ball with two hands over the head.

Make It Fun

Use softer balls and let players try to rob home runs.



Coaching Keys

Young players often miss fly balls because they take their eyes off the ball to find the fence. They should first glance back to where they are running and then pick up the ball without looking at the fence again. Once they get to the warning track, have them start feeling for the fence with their throwing hand. At this point they should remain focused on the flight of the ball.





Hitting Balls to Outfielders

Objective

To give outfielders a more realistic look at balls coming off a bat

Setup

A bucket of balls, a fungo bat (or any bat), a coach to hit, a player or coach to catch throws

Execution

Just as is true for infielders, it's important to hit balls of all kinds to your outfielders. Most of the drills and skills mentioned here for outfielders can be performed with coaches hitting balls. Again, it's important that the coach understands the skill level of the players he is hitting to and to adapt accordingly, sometimes even from one player to the next. Don't hit balls too high or too hard or use hard baseballs until players are confident catching ground balls and fly balls the right way. Once they're comfortable, repetitions are the best way for outfielders to improve.