

Rundowns or Pickle

At first, the coaches take the running position. (I make sure none of the fielders have been through this "school" before). The coaches get to tease the kids and lampoon (word for the day) their various miscues. The adults are almost always safe at this point and a grand time is had by the good guys. Then the coaches take the field, and put out several kids without any trouble. The boys assume it's because we're bigger, stronger, faster &c.

Then we tell them the "secrets" of pickle. Basically, I teach three rules:

(1) **INSIDE POSITION:** The fielders should set up three feet towards the infield side of the baseline. Most kids try chasing a runner (we call them "rabbits") along the baseline itself, but that leads to problems of obstructed throws hitting runners in the back and interference by fielders. So set them up on the outside edge, a little in front of the base.

(2) **SYSTEM BEATS SPEED:** I've ask the boys, "When does a kid run faster than Deion Sanders?" They eventually hit on the answer: When Deion (or name the athlete) is standing still. They can get Deion (or us lumbering oldsters) to stand still by making us change directions. This is done by running at the "rabbit", making him go at speed toward a base, then throwing to the receiver standing in front of that base. When the rabbit changes direction, even the slowest fielder will make up ground against him. And if the rabbit gets away from one chaser, there are plenty more in line to finish him off.

(3) **FAIRNESS:** Boys usually want to outrun the "rabbit" to tag him out -- it's a notion of fair play or something. I teach them to **NEVER BE FAIR**. Once the rundown starts, everyone (including outfielders) has to hustle to their positions; as soon as the receiver calls for a throw, the chaser tosses the ball, peels off, and gets back to the base in his backup position. Thus, it's not 2 against 1 but 6 or 9 against 1.

A few random thoughts: This is the only drill I let adults participate in, and they have to be real careful for the kids. But once the kids get the hang of the system, they become invincible. It's humbling watching a gang of 7,8 and 9 y.o. swoop in on a 25 or 30 y.o. -- or the cornered look in the eye as the grown up realizes he has no chance. Pickle is always a favorite kid game, but the chance to run down an adult makes it twice as much fun (for the kid).

Most coaches emphasize running the rabbit back toward the previous base. Once the boys become accomplished in this system, it really doesn't matter what direction the rabbit is headed -- he's dead. I have seen a couple of occasions where I was convinced that the fielders were running at, er, less than full speed just for the fun of harrassing the trapped rabbit. And I've seen runners in games simply give up after running back & forth with no end in sight.

Like Bear, I prefer to let the fielders standing at the oncoming base call for the throw. Fakes tend to trick the other fielders. I do emphasize tagging the rabbit with the bear hand down toward the waist. Some nasty runners have simply dived down when a tag was attempted at the shoulders; the fielder then tends to trip over the runner & lose the play.