

# STAR FIELDING FUNDAMENTALS

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## HOW THE GLOVE FITS

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Experienced ball players know just how important the right glove is for the position. For example, infielders have to get the ball out of their glove quickly, for the fast action of double plays. A smaller size helps- 11" to 12" is ideal (11" for 2<sup>nd</sup> Base, 12" for 3<sup>rd</sup> Base, 11 ½" for Shortstop.) Outfielders usually prefer 12" to 13" sizes. Since they cover a lot of ground, good glove "reach" is important. Youth gloves correspond roughly to the child's age. They range from 9 ½" to 10" for T-Ball and up to 12" for the more seasoned youth.

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## COMMUNICATING

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It's really important to talk to the other fielders. Sometimes you want to decide before a play who will cover what, like the second baseman telling the shortstop that he will cover the bag. But you always want to yell loudly for the ball if it is popped up to you, even if you think no one else is going for it; if you don't, you might bump a teammate and no one will catch the ball.

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## PROPER TECHNIQUE FOR THROWING

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Each Player has to know the proper technique for throwing the baseball. This will keep sore arms to a minimum. The player throwing the ball should square his back foot like he is putting it against the pitching rubber as a pitcher would when pitching from the stretch. The throwing arm should be fully extended behind the player.

He should grip the baseball with the thumb down and the index and middle finger on top forming a "V". The player should be able to look back and see the top two fingers forming the "V" if the arm is fully extended.

Line your front shoulder and hip with your target prior to throwing to aid your visual focusing and to have a better control of the throw and always hold the ball loose with your fingers and hand to promote speed and accuracy of your throws. The target should always be at the chest of the other player. This works whether the distance is 6 feet or 60 feet. The receiving player can handle the ball much easier if thrown at the chest.

Follow through with the throwing shoulder toward the target after releasing the ball to eliminate arm strain and to help control your throw, and always keep your throwing arm and wrist loose and flexible for more command of control and speed of your throw. The throwing motion should be as over hand as possible. Never tuck the ball behind your ear before throwing.

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## FIELDING GROUNDERS

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The best way to field a ground ball, especially in the infield, is to stand so that when you get the ball in your glove, your glove foot is forward. That way as you come up step forward with the left foot as you grip the ball, and then throw the ball you step forward with the right foot. This gives two steps as you throw, and will give you more velocity on the ball.

Always field a ground ball with your hands in front of the bill of the cap. This helps with seeing the ball and your glove more effectively. Also, always use a crossover step when moving to either side to field ground balls or fly balls, this insures a quicker break to the ball.

Keep a 'little finger to little finger' relationship with the hands with the glove wide open and facing the ball when fielding a ground ball for better glove dexterity and control. Also keep a 'thumb to thumb' relationship with the hands when catching a fly ball to insure a successful catch along with the ability to make a quality throw.

Your feet should be slightly outside your shoulders and knees should be bent at a 45-degree angle. Remember to always bend at the knees and never at the waist. Field the ball in front of your body with your trap or throwing hand near your glove for help from bad hops.

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## THE READY POSITION

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Stars players should notice the body lean, knees bent, glove down and ready, shoulders square, feet shoulder width apart, heels up, and eyes focused. This player can easily move forward, backward, right, or left with great quickness. **This is desired fielding positions for all Stars!**



Each infielder must pretend that each batter is a fungo hitter who is attempting to hit a ground ball to him on every pitch. Then the infielder won't be surprised when the ball leaves the bat and heads in his direction. If he doesn't play this mind game with himself on every pitch, then when the ball does come to him he will have a tendency to rock back on his heels, which will put him at a disadvantage in moving quickly toward the ball.

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## **CHARGE THE BALL**

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When fielding a ground ball, always go to the ball. Don't back up or wait for it to get to you. If you charge, you will get to it faster. Plus if it takes a bad bounce while you're going back or waiting, it will be harder to adjust, and if you charge you might get to it before it takes a bad bounce.

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## **TAKE EXTRA PRACTICE WITH OTHER FIELDERS**

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If your position is as a second baseman, get to practice a little early and practice turning the double play with the shortstop. Or you might practice covering first base while the first baseman is taking grounders, so he'll get used to throwing to a teammate instead of racing the batter to the base. It's really important to practice with the other fielders that you work with in a game, so that you all have confidence in each other.

A baseball team would like to consider every ground ball hit to an infielder as a "sure out." But this can be achieved only by a lot of hard work in practice sessions and with plenty of concentration on the part of all the infielders, along with an abundance of natural talent. Playing the infield requires great athletic skill, but these skills can be developed.

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## **GENERAL DEFENSE: BASIC FIELDING FUNDAMENTALS**

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- Glove should be on the ground and glove and opposite hand should form a basket to receive the ball. No ball has ever gone through the glove, only underneath it.
- The player can not just bend from the waist and expect to field a ground ball. Rear end should not be up in the air. If knees are flexed properly, the butt will be down.
- With runners at first and second, the standard bunt defense calls for the first and third basemen, along with the pitcher, to charge the ball, while the second baseman covers first. In the "wheel" defense with runners at first and second, the same players charge the ball, but the shortstop - after he "drives" the runner on second back to the bag with an aggressive jab step—then races to cover third. The second baseman covers second. The ball is thrown to third unless the fielder is certain the runner will be safe.
- With runners on first and third, there are three basic defensive strategies: First, the catcher can try to throw out the runner heading for second base. Second, the shortstop or second baseman can cut off a throw to second in front of the bag and relay it to the catcher to put out a runner trying to steal home. Finally, the catcher can throw to third to attempt to pick off the runner.

- When the bases are loaded or runners are at first and third with less than two outs, infielders should be placed in a “split” position, with the first and third basemen playing in and the middle infielders at double-play depth.
- On relays from the outfield to the middle infielder to get a runner going from third to home, the key is to keep the ball off the ground. Make quick, crisp, accurate throws. And infielders should be in a position to start the tandem as quickly as possible.

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## KEYS FOR INFIELDBERS

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- Be aware and consider the speed of the batter and any base runners. Be aware of how much time you have. Don't panic! If you knock a hard hit ball down and keep it front of you, you very often will have plenty of time to make a play.
- Short stop and second baseman- talk to each other! Who's covering second on a steal? Who will take a throw from the pitcher? Communicate communicate, communicate!
- Pick up the catcher's signs and try and know what pitch is being thrown. A fastball away to right-handed batter may mean a ball to the right side of the infield.
- See the ball. Watch it all the way into your glove.
- Have good body position. Try to field the ball from the middle of your body over to your glove side.
- Use the full length of your glove (heel of the glove to the fingertips) and width of your glove (thumb to your little glove fingers). **KEEP YOUR GLOVE OPEN!**
- Use your feet- crow hop to throw. Throw cross seam - so the ball won't tail, sink or run to the player you are throwing to.
- When throwing - focus on your target. Don't watch the flight of the ball.
- Stress **ACCURACY** on every throw.
- Infielders should work on coming in on ground balls. When a ball is bouncing use two hands. When a ball is rolling slowly you can use your bare hand.
- Be sure to work on going side to side on ground balls- backhand and forehand. Don't forget the proper footwork & balance.
- Work on your double plays. Concentrate on foot work & glove hand transfer.
- Work on going after fly balls-both side to side and forward & back.

- During your pop-up and fly ball drills, make sure you work on shading the sun.
- Again, remember to always stress throwing accuracy and proper footwork on every drill and play.

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## **FIRST-BASE DEFENSE**

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The basic positioning of a first baseman depends on the batter, on the inning, and on how many outs there are. The standard position is five steps back toward the right-field wall on a diamond with 70-foot bases. (For regulation diamonds with 90-foot base paths, seven steps off the line and seven steps back is standard.) The first baseman should try for as much depth as possible without giving up the chance to field a routine ground ball and beat the runner in a race to first - yet still be able to cover a bunt.

Double-play depth depends on whether the batter bats right- or left-handed. For a right-handed hitter, the first baseman should hold the runner close, then drop back. For a lefty he should stay closer, then, when the pitch is released, shuffle off the bag.

With runners on first and second, play in front of the runner and the bag, but keep an eye on the runner so he doesn't get too big a lead. With good hitters or with those who hit to the right side of the infield, play behind the runner, and jab-step toward the bag to hold the runner. In the late innings in a close game, play closer to first base to guard against doubles hit down the right-field line.

Inexperienced first basemen will stretch before the ball is thrown or before they see the flight of the ball. Often times they find themselves already stretched out, and then the ball is thrown to the left, to the right, or high. They should stretch **TO THE BALL**.

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## **SECOND-BASE DEFENSE**

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For second basemen, the standard positioning on a diamond of 70-foot bases is six steps toward first base and six steps toward right field. (On a regulation diamond, nine steps toward first and nine steps back.)

In double-play situations, the middle infielders should "pinch" the middle of the infield, with the second baseman moving four steps toward first and four steps back. When left-handed hitters are up, play seven steps back and seven steps toward first. If the second baseman can get in front of a ground ball hit to his extreme left, then he must do that. In bunt situations, play closer to first base.

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## **SHORTSTOP DEFENSE**

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The standard position for shortstop play on 70-foot diamonds is seven steps toward third base and seven steps toward left field (nine steps plus nine steps on regulation diamonds), because most action is up the "spine" of the infield. Young players often play too close to third base or "in the hole."

In double-play situations or to cover a steal, the shortstop should take the risk of pinching up the middle and letting any ball hit in the hole become the third baseman's responsibility. He should position himself approximately four or five steps from the second base bag and the same number of steps back.

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### **THIRD BASE DEFENSE**

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Six steps toward second base and two steps toward left field is the standard position for a third baseman. In the late innings or in close games, the third baseman should guard against doubles down the line. Third basemen shouldn't try to hold runners at third. If a runner takes too big a lead, the catcher should call a pitchout and throw to third.

Third basemen must have the reactions of a rattlesnake if they are to handle a line drive or hard-hit ball to their backhand. The ball gets to third much faster than it does to any other position. Also, third basemen must be able to come in on a slowly hit ground ball or bunted ball. Because balls are hit at them so hard, they must have the courage and mental toughness to get in front of and knock down the ball, and in position to throw out the runner.

A third baseman should assume a lower ready position than that of a shortstop or second baseman. And because the ball gets to a third baseman so quickly, his glove should be held a little closer to the ground than other positions.

The slow-roller is the toughest play for a third baseman, and there are two basic ways to make it. The first is the one-handed play: The fielder comes in, reaches down, and catches the ball with his glove hand, then he brings the ball up and throws hard to first base, but with a slower release than that used in the other method, which is the two-handed play. This one offers him a quicker release but doesn't allow him to throw the ball as hard.

In bunting situations, it is important that the defense gets an out - even if it means the third baseman makes a mistake by coming in for a ball that might have been thrown to third base, calling off the pitcher in the process, and getting an out at first base. A team cannot afford to blow this play and allow the other team to load the bases with no outs.

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### **OUTFIELD**

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When catching the "do-or-die" ground ball, it is important for the outfielder to catch the ball to the outside side of his left foot - but as close to it as possible. On the next step, he should crow-hop and get into position to throw. If the outfielder charges the ball too hard and doesn't use jab steps, then he will have to take extra steps to throw to the plate. And for every step he takes, the runner takes two. The outfielders must understand that a routine ground ball with no runners on base is NOT a "do-or-die" situation. Take good routes to the ball and always keep the ball in front of you.

An outfielder should always anticipate bad throws around the infield, and so he should always try to put himself in a good back-up position.

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## **CATCHERS**

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Always give your pitcher a level target. When throwing, point your shoulder towards the base you're throwing to. Have quick feet! Step and throw.

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### **CATCHERS: THROWING FOOTWORK**

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There are two types of throwing footwork that I will address: jump pivot and load and throw. The location of the pitch and the arm strength of the individual will determine the footwork.

If a ball is thrown right down the middle of the plate or towards the forehand, a catcher that does not possess great arm strength will utilize the jump pivot. The jump pivot allows for a quicker release and is recommended for catchers with quick hands and a lack of great arm strength. The catcher will quickly shift their feet from parallel to second, to perpendicular to second. Catchers will not move toward the right handed hitter or away from the left handed hitter. Their back foot will end up where their backside started, while their front foot will end up where their glove started. A common error is for the catcher to move towards their glove and fall off balance. The catcher should assume a pole is running throughout the middle of their body. They want to shift around the pole, not spin away from the pole. Another key is to make sure the catcher does not stand straight up on their first movement. Stay low and in a strong, athletic position. This will assist the catcher in staying on top of the baseball and throwing downhill toward the base.

If a ball is thrown right down the middle of the plate or towards the backhand, a catcher that possesses arm strength will utilize the load and throw. Catch the baseball while shifting weight to the back leg. Again, the catcher must square their body to second. The catcher must still utilize a quick glove/hand exchange with the baseball and stay low to the ground in a strong, athletic position. The catcher must get into a position where weight is on the back leg and the shoulders are squared to the base they are throwing. If the alignment is off, or the catcher has already stood up, the power that they possess in their throwing arm is lost.

It is important to mention at this time that a catcher must be proficient at both skills. The location of the baseball will dictate which footwork you use. The only exception is on a ball thrown to the middle of the catcher's body. On this throw, the catcher will determine which throwing footwork will be best for them.

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### **CATCHERS: THROWS TO THIRD BASE**

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A catcher can utilize three methods of throwing to third base. They can take a jab step towards the backhand, throw over a right-handed hitter, or shuffle behind a right-handed hitter. The location of the pitch, height of the hitter, and arm strength and size of the catcher will determine which throw is best.

On pitches that take the catcher toward their backhand, the jab step is an appropriate throwing position. The catcher will simply take a jab step with their outside foot, plant their foot, stay low,

point the shoulders to third, and make a strong and accurate throw. This will clear you from the hitter and give the catcher a lane to throw in.

On a pitch that is down the middle, the catcher can use one of two methods. First, depending on whether there is a right or left handed hitter, and how tall the right handed hitter is in relation to the catcher, the catcher could plant the back leg, step towards third with the front leg and throw over the top of the hitter. The object is to have a lane to throw in without the hitter getting in the way and disrupting the throw. If the hitter is taller than the catcher or the pitch takes the catcher towards the forehand side, the catcher can utilize a quick shuffle outside the hitter and create a throwing lane. Again, stay low, athletic, square the body to the base and make a strong and accurate throw to third.

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## **RUNDOWNS: SLAM DUNKS OF DEFENSIVE BASEBALL**

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A team unprepared to deal with rundowns might panic if a runner gets caught off base. But few situations favor the defense more. Once a team masters the following strategies it'll view rundowns as "slam dunk" outs.

The keys to the entire rundown defense are as follows:

- Conduct the entire rundown as far away from the lead base.
- Stay out of the runner's path when not in possession of the ball.
- Force the runner full speed back to the original (trail) base.
- Hold the ball steady; don't pump fake. During rundowns, never attempt a ball fake. This only fakes out a teammate, not the runner.
- Tag the runner as soon as you can. Hold the ball in your hand with the ball in the glove.
- Limit the play to only one throw.
- Apply these fundamentals in all rundowns, regardless of which players are involved or which direction you tell them to go after throwing the ball.
- Before a tag is even attempted, infielders must establish proper coverage of the lead and trail bases. All nine defenders take part.
- Stars players should always position themselves at least 10-15 feet away from each base in order to force the runner into the middle of the base path. A third infielder stands adjacent to the lead base. The pitcher and catcher, if not already engaged in the play, provide back up, as do the outfielders. The value of back up cannot be overemphasized.
- Start the rundown by getting the ball as quickly as possible in front of the runner-into the hands of the fielder 10 feet from the lead base. If no one is there

to accept a throw, whoever has the ball must run and occupy that position. Guarding the lead base is the first priority.

- The next priority is to stay out of the runner's way. Anyone without the ball or not in the act of fielding the ball who blocks the progress of a base runner will be called for obstruction.

The ball handler sprints toward the runner, forcing him to abandon his shuffle steps, square his shoulders, and retreat at full speed. Speed is crucial. It exposes the runner's inherent vulnerability in rundowns. While sprinting, the infielder holds the ball steady beside his ear ready to tag or release at any instant. The trail base fielder presents his glove as a visible target and is poised to move toward an errant throw, just in case.

As the runner approaches within 10-15 feet (the dangerous third) of the receiving fielder, the ball handler gains control of his body and throws. The base runner will consume precious seconds coming to a complete stop and changing direction.

During this maneuver, he is an easy mark. A synchronized throw will allow the receiving fielder to administer the tag with only a stride or two toward the runner. After releasing the ball, the fielder peels off either to the inside or the outside. Whichever method a coach teaches, players should employ it consistently on all throws. The fielder then curls back to the base and becomes a back up.

With two runners on base, the defense must cover the lead and trail bases of both runners and prepare for simultaneous rundowns. If the lead runner is in a rundown, the defense focuses on the greater scoring threat. At the play's conclusion, if both runners occupy the same base, tag them both and you still gain an out.

Runners at first and third pose another challenge. The trail runner may stray off base hoping to draw a throw and permit the lead runner to score. Have the infield shout a verbal signal, such as "Going" or, "Step off," when they see the trail runner leaving early.

Upon hearing the signal, the pitcher steps off the rubber to prevent a balk. He'll then launch the basic rundown defense already described. While attacking the runner on first, whoever has the ball must remain in control and be ready to throw home. Again, a verbal signal is in order when the runner on third makes his break.

Anytime a rundown begins with the trail-base fielder possessing the ball, such as after a pick-off attempt, he momentarily stands his ground. He doesn't want to force the runner toward the lead base. Nor can he leave his post until back up arrives. Instead, he waits for the lead-base fielder to charge in and then throws to him.

During rundown drills in practice, all potential ball handlers play the part of the runner. Stars players draw on this experience the next time they're on defense. From the runner's vantagepoint, they can best sense the optimum moment for the fielder to throw the ball to secure the out.