

# Fundamental Baseball and Softball Teaching Points

## Hitting

### **Tee Drill:**

Tee

#### **Purpose:**

Helps a player effectively work on hitting pitches in all locations.

#### **Equipment:**

Bat and helmet; Batting Tee

#### **Setup:**

This drill can be used as a batting practice station.

#### **Execution:**

- Start by placing the ball in the middle of the plate thigh high. Take a few swings.
- Move the tee in and forward to simulate an inside pitch. Take a few swings.
- Move the ball outside and back to simulate an outside pitch. Take a few swings.
- Use the three placements above and this time vary the height of the tee to simulate high and low pitches.

Note:

Move the tee to simulate different locations, not the hitter's position in the box. Visualization is important in this drill. Have the hitter look out to where the pitcher would be. Have him imagine a windup and pitch and tracking the ball into the actual location on the tee where he will hit it.

### **Tee 1-2-3**

#### **Drill:**

Tee 1-2-3

#### **Purpose:**

This drill helps a player and coach isolate and work on different aspects of hitting

**Equipment:**

Bat; Batting Tee; Baseballs

**Setup:**

This drill can be used as a batting practice station.

**Execution:**

Hitter will take his stance. Coach or parent will call out 1,2,3. Make sure you don't rush. The idea is to give the player and coach the opportunity to check his position at each pause. It also gives the coach a chance to see and correct problems that he may not notice when the player is hitting without a pause. Player will take his stance with a ball on the tee.

- 1.Player will coil and hold.
- 2.Player will stride keeping weight back and pause.
- 3.Player will complete his swing.

**Soft Toss from Front Drill:**

- A coach sets up behind a screen 10-15 feet in front of you, ready to toss baseballs.
- Balls are tossed softly but firmly toward the outside part of the plate.
- Tosses should not be so hard as to force you to speed up your swing.
- Tosses should not have an arc soft, but firm.
- Try to hit the ball hard to the “big part of the field.” This forces you to stride toward the pitcher, keeping your front shoulder in and hitting the ball out in front of the plate.
- Repeating this exercise develops a solid swing that will enable you to adjust to any pitch.
- Your coach can mix up locations as you become comfortable and consistent in executing the drill properly.
- If you are pulling weak ground balls, you need to adjust your stride and timing to hit the ball more up the middle.
- You should take at least 10 swings when doing this drill.
- As with any drill, doing soft toss from the front until you are tired will increase your strength.

## **Groundball Basics**

You have all been to a practice before, chances are that you've seen a variation on the following: the coach lines his players up, hits the ball to them, and the ones with some existing skill or innate talent do

a good job... while the new player or the less talented athlete struggles. The coach tells them to "get in front of the ball," to "get their glove down," and to "keep the ball in front of them." And that's about the extent of it.

Maybe this improves over the course of the season. Unfortunately, it has been our experience that this is all too often not the case - instead, the lesser fielders get dropped into the outfield in an effort to minimize their liability to the team. As a result, they get less practice reps than the infielders, and if anything, the disparity between the skill level of infield and outfield widens further.

What the suggestion is that you, as the coach, need to make sure that you give all of your players the tools they need in order to succeed. The best way you can do this is by repetitions - and then consistently teaching - the fundamentals of baseball fielding.

**Triangle:** Have players reach their glove out on the ground in front of themselves about the same distance as the width between their feet, as if they are fielding an imaginary grounder. Have them hold the position, and point out that the three things on the ground - each foot, plus the tip of the glove - form the points of a triangle. This is the ideal position for fielding a ground ball; feet too close together take away the ability to move laterally, a glove too close to the feet gives no room for error when scooping up a grounder.

**Both Hands:** This is possibly the most critical aspect of fielding grounders that you can teach, and is oddly enough, the one most often ignored by coaches and players. When set to field a grounder, the glove should be placed on the ground, and the other hand should be open, ready to close on the ball like a door. Be sure they do not have the hand in the glove too early which is often caused by "the alligator approach", hand to the side ready to close like a door.

**Stay Down, then come up:** Teach your kids that, when fielding a grounder, they should always begin with the tip of the glove on the ground. If the ball takes a hop, they can bring their glove up to it; even if they misjudge, odds are excellent that their top hand and/or their body will block the ball and keep it from going past.

**Footwork:** The first instinct that many young fielders have when fielding a grounder not hit right at them is to turn to the side and run towards the ball. Unless the fielder is trying to make a stab at a ball deep in the hole, this is the wrong way to do it.

Turning sideways causes the player to lose focus on the ball, keep your triangle, stay low, and make the play. A side step or shuffle is often the best way to describe this.



- If the ground ball is rolled close to the cone the player should hustle to get around the ball, plant his right foot and field the ball as he begins moving toward the target. Try to roll it at a speed that allows them to move around the cone. This helps to emphasize the change in direction.
- If the ground ball is rolled farther away the player should hustle over to get into position to backhand the ball.
- After fielding the ball, the fielder should make a good throw.

**Notes:** As your players get comfortable with both techniques, remove the cone and move farther away. This will allow you to throw the ball in different positions, with various hops, and at different speeds. This will help them get comfortable with the footwork required to field most balls that are hit to their right.

With the ball that they can get in front of, make sure you get them to round the ball enough to be able to stop their momentum for going to the right. This will allow them to field the ball smoothly and make a quick throw. Fielding the ball in front of them while still moving to the right is a difficult play to make and puts them in a poor position to throw the ball.

## **Follow the Ball Drill**

### **Drill:**

Follow the Ball

### **Purpose:**

Warm-up and conditioning infield drill

### **Equipment:**

Infield area with bases and balls.

### **Setup:**

Place 1 player at each infield position except pitcher. All other players are in a line at SS ready to receive a ground ball.

### ➤ **Execution:**

Coach hits a ground ball to the SS who throw to 1B, who throws to 2B, who throws to 3B who throws home. After each throw the player goes to the base they just threw to for the next round, and the catcher goes to the back of the line at SS (thus follow the ball).

In all cases the focus is on good throws, proper catching technique and tagging. 1B should be focused on a proper step and catch, 2B, 3B and Catcher should receive the ball in the correct manner so they can place the tag quickly.

## **Partner Ground Balls**

- Put the children in groups of 2.
- Draw a decent sixes triangle
- Put the glove hand and throwing arm at the top of the triangle.
- The feet go at the other two corners.

- The children should be mirroring each other from about 5 feet away.
- The children's hands should be like an alligator's mouth. Glove on the ground and the hand slightly above it.
- Athletes should roll ground balls back and forth to each other. During this drill athletes should be working on the form you set them up on (triangle and alligator form).

### **Benefits**

- This drill works on proper fielding form
- Glove position
- Throwing hand position
- Seeing the ball into the glove
- Good fielding/body position

## **Throwing Mechanics**

### **Holding the Ball**

- Hold the ball across the seams.
- Find where the seams create a "horseshoe"; lay your fingers across the two sets of seams, near the horseshoe.
- A three-finger grip is fine for players with smaller hands.
- It may be easier for younger players to grip the seams near the closed end of the horseshoe, as the seams are a bit closer together there.
- Fingers should be a comfortable distance apart – not too wide.
- Thumb should be under the ball, serving as an anchor.
- Nice, easy grip in the fingers: *"Hold it like an egg."*
- Fingertips generate proper rotation, which helps with movement and velocity.
- Fingertips must contact the seams.

### **Hand Over the Top of the Ball**

- Your hand should be on top of the ball when you remove it from your glove before throwing; you should take the ball down, out and up in a circular motion.
- The throwing motion is continuous: Make sure to create a circular motion, causing your arm to come forward without a pause.
- Some coaches teach players to bring their arms straight back to a position in which there is a pause, with their wrists cocked but without creating the down-out-and-up motion.

- This reduces some of the momentum created by the circular movement, and cuts down on the arm action necessary to throw properly and with maximum velocity.
- Your hand should remain above the ball until your arm comes forward, at which point should actually move behind the ball; this creates arm action and torque.
- Be sure that your hand is never underneath the ball.
- Your accuracy will be improved if you keep your hand behind the ball -- and not slightly to the side, known as “coming around the ball” -- as you approach the release point.
- If you’ve done everything properly, your arm should form an L at the release point, with your elbow slightly above your shoulder.
- To ensure accuracy, point your front shoulder toward the target and step toward it as you release the ball.

### **Elbow Above Shoulder**

- As you take the ball out of your glove -- making a circular motion by bringing your throwing hand down, out and up -- you should be stepping directly toward your target.
- When your arm comes forward, your hand should shift from above the ball to behind it.
- To ensure that your hand is behind the ball, it is important that your arm and elbow form an “L” at the release point, with your elbow slightly above your shoulder.
- If you drop your elbow, your hand will automatically come around the ball, producing a throw that doesn’t carry as well and that tends to drop as it travels toward its target.
- Keeping your elbow above your shoulder also helps to prevent placing unnecessary strain on your elbow.

### **Proper Throwing Form Teaching points**

- Start with making kids have a good base. It should be about hip width apart.
- Bodies should not be squared off towards target they should be open. Look at it this way the door should be opened not closed.
- Feet should be facing in the same direction as the body.
- Glove arm should be pointing straight out towards the target.
- Throwing arm should in the shape of an “L”.
- The wrist and ball should be pointed away from the target.
- When releasing the ball lead with throwing arm elbow still in “L” position.
- During the release of the throw the glove should be tucking into the armpit at the same time.
- During the throw front foot should step towards target and end up with toes pointing towards the target.
- Finish with throwing arm at opposite hip of throwing arm side and glove arm should still be tucked into the armpit.
- Foot that does not step to target should follow throwing arm naturally.

## **Accurate Throwing Drill**

- Line kids up in one long line from home to first clear down the right field line.
- If there are too many kids make two lines going from home to third clear down the left field line.
- Start 5-7feet apart and increase distance with age or as kids get better.
- Once athlete's get pretty good at their throws you can make this drill a competition to see what line finishes first.
- This applies pressure to make good throws
- Once drill becomes a competition every player must touch the ball once.
- So if there is a bad throw or missed catch it has to go back to the athlete who the ball missed.

### **Benefits**

- Teamwork
- Accurate throwing
- Rapid-fire throwing
- Throwing under pressure
- Good throwing form

## **Coaching Resources:**

Softball:

<http://www.softball-spot.com/> --Hundreds of drill videos and coaching resources. Great progression of pitching drills for both the brand new pitcher and pitchers looking to improve their skills.

Baseball:

<http://www.baseballpositive.com/team-drills/> - Full of drills, practice plans and coaching resources.