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PART III: **BASERUNNING**

BASE RUNNING

The area of base running is an often under practiced and misunderstood part of baseball. Good base running often go unnoticed whereas base running mistakes are as obvious as an umpire wearing a bikini. Good, effective base running doesn't require speed as much as it requires an understanding of the game situation, the score of the game, the number of outs and the inning. Base running is much more than stealing a base or scoring from second base with two outs. Base running begins with the coach instilling an attitude of aggressiveness in their players. Coaches need to create practice situations that allow their players to stretch their capabilities to advance more than one base at a time. Coaches also need to "sell" their players on the concept of what is called "game speed" or "best speed". Game speed means that you practice and play the game by running the bases at full speed, no matter if you hit a routine ground ball or fly ball or a possible in side the park homerun. All too often young players give up on the supposed routine play and get caught in some embarrassing situations which become non productive for your team. We have all seen the error that turns into an out when our players go less than game speed. We also have seen the runner get thrown out on a close play because he loafed in the first several steps out of the batter's box. Trying to turn on the speed instead of realizing top speed in your first 4 – 5 steps has cost our teams too many outs over the course of a season. Our players not knowing the correct number of outs has cost our teams scoring opportunities and created need less outs. Have you ever had to squelch the enthusiasm generated by scoring an important run after your player failed to tag up? Not a pleasant place to be.

Aggressive base running done with proper practice and training is an exciting and productive part of the game at any age level. We are going to cover base running starting at home plate and continuing around the bases. We will deal with breaks, leads, routes, proper use of the base coach, reads, balls in the dirt, tag ups, steals, game situations and drills for practicing aggressive base running. Learning to take the risk of being thrown out is a key hurdle to help you players overcome. With risk comes reward. Let's investigate the world of base running.

HOME PLATE TO FIRST BASE

- 1. Getting out of the batter's box** –The seemingly simple act of getting out of the batter's box on a ground ball to the infield needs to be taught. Actually the first point should be the act of setting or dropping the bat in or around the batter's box and not throwing it. This part of the game is important for safety and umpire longevity since the umpire is usually the recipient of the flying bat. Putting a mat or carpet square next to the batter's box and having the players practice dropping the bat on the mat after a full swing and then running to 1B will help start the habit of dropping and not throwing the bat.
 - RH hitter** – The first step will be with the right foot moving down the 1B line directly towards the 1B bag. The follow through will cause the right leg to fall in to the plate, starting the motion towards first base. With in 2 –3 strides the batter – runner should be at top speed and in effective running form. A slight rolling of the head and eyes in the direction of the ball can give the runner a visual clue whether he will need a straight line run through or start a base hit route. Younger players should be schooled to focus on the edge of first base closest to them and to run through the base.
 - LH hitter** – The first step will be a cross over step with the left foot as a result of the swing. . Again, move directly down the first base line towards the base. With in 2 – 3 strides the batter – runner should be at top speed and using effective running form. The same concepts apply regarding the rolling of the head and the need for young players to focus on the near edge of the 1B bag.
- 2. Hard - 90** – This hard 90 concept (based on the 90 foot distance from home plate to 1B on the regulation diamond) comes from the need for players to run EVERY ball through the 1B bag not merely to the base. The hard 90 also gives the player the concept of running, not leaping, lunging or sliding at the base. Leaping at the base is not only slower for the runner but the chance of ankle and knee injury is greatly increased. Sliding should be used only to avoid a tag by the first base man (reading the feet of the first baseman will initiate the slide and will be covered in another section). Sliding will not get you the base quicker than a hard 90. The player should focus both eyes on the side of the base closest to home plate. This focus will allow him to unconsciously adjust his stride so that his foot will contact the edge of the base. Contacting this near edge will work to give him a slight advantage over the runner that contacts the base in the middle or near the back edge. This advantage should be noticed by the umpire and result in more “safe” calls for your team.
- 3. Breakdown and advance** – The base runner must be able to gain control of his body and stride after the touching of the base in order to advance to second base on an over throw (this is accomplished by chopping your steps, bending the knees and turning your shoulders parallel to the foul line with your upper body facing towards fair territory.) The runner should not sacrifice the hard 90 concept to attain control for a possible advance. The runner can take a peek over his shoulder to get a good indication if advancing is possible. Relying on the 1B

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coach is going to be his primary tool for advancing to 2B or beyond. An important coaching point arises in this situation. You must work with your runners so they become familiar with your home field and the distance to the fence behind 1B (visiting fields also). Also spend time with your team preparing them to be a base coach. Establishing verbal signals, knowing the score, inning, outs and field limitations are the main parts of preparing your players. A positive aspect of this is that, the more important you can make seemingly unimportant parts of the game, the more involved and important your players will feel. Turning your shoulders as previously described does not constitute an attempt to advance and put you in jeopardy of being tagged out. There has to be an actual step or steps taken towards 2B. Make sure your players understand this point.

4. **The base hit route or the turn** – Singles that are turned into doubles, advancing to second on a bobbled ball by the outfielder or stretching a double into a triple all start with a commitment to getting to top running speed within 3 –5 steps after contact. Another component to this concept is having an aggressive mindset that will put pressure on the outfielder to stop the runner from advancing. You add proper, efficient base running routes that allow for the shortest distance around the bases and you have created a very aggressive and effective base running approach for your team.
 - **Full speed in 3 - 5 steps** – As was mentioned in the previous section on the left handed and right handed hitters getting out of the box for the “hard 90”, full speed is established quickly. The base hit route will begin as the hitter roles his head and determines that the ball is indeed through the infield. The direction of the batter – runner is adjusted to running a tight circle route, aiming at the first base coaching box.
 - **The turn** – The runner wants to slightly drop his left shoulder and lean slightly towards the middle of the diamond as he begins his turn. This will create the tight, efficient circle route.
 - **Touch the base** – Ideally the runner should touch the inside corner of the base with their left foot. Stress this but allow for the right foot to touch if a player has to slow down to touch the base. In other words, maintaining full speed is the priority. Explode off the base with your head and eyes up.
 - **Tighten the circle** – The runner should drive his right hip and right hand towards second base as he completes his turn. This action will complete the “tight circle” started when he was leaning into the center of the diamond as he began the turn.
 - **Head up, find the ball** – Locating the ball with out slowing down is a skill that takes repetition and experience. In other words, PRACTICE and GAME experience. Running with your head down in baseball will create situations where either your players will lose their aggressiveness or run into needles outs. They will not know where the ball is or be able to pick up the base coach. They can take a peek at the base to be sure they touch it but in all other instances a “heads up” technique is required.

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- Make the outfielder stop you – The basic rule is to go as far towards second as you can and make the outfielder have to hustle to get the ball back to the infield. The further the ball is away from second base, the longer your turn will be. The ball hit towards the left field line will allow for a bigger (in distance) turn. The ball hit to the right fielder will require a shorter turn. ALWAYS expect the outfielder to bobble or fumble the ball. Look for the outfielder that is lazy or is going at a slow pace to field the ball. In both cases you can stretch that single into a double by being AGGRESSIVE.
 - Technique to end the turn – On balls hit from the left field line all the way to right center field the runner should have his right side, chest and shoulder directed at the ball. The runner should lower his hips, bend his knees and end in a shuffle step. His weight should be over his right thigh. This will allow him to either advance or return to first base depending on the situation. On balls hit to right field the runner should turn and face the right fielder instead of trying to look over their shoulder at the ball. This technique will give the runner a better opportunity to either advance or return to the base.
 - Putting it all together – The techniques that we have given to you will be the same for all bases. If you were to draw a circle from home plate and have it intersect all the bases and return to home you will see the concept we have given you. The challenge you have is instilling in your players the aggressive approach we have promoted. Their fear of being put out trying to take the extra base is a real one and needs to be overcome. Your support in practice and commitment to being aggressive, even when some player's get thrown out, will go a long way to instilling the attitude of "taking the extra base."
5. **Pre pitch sequence** – Missing signs, not looking for signs, not knowing the number of outs or not advancing more than one base will drive a coach a little crazy. Here is a method that works, at any base, and can be implemented the first day you do base running.
- While on the base make eye contact with the coach (3B coach or dugout, depending on your style.)
 - Get the sign and have an acknowledgement sign returned to you by the runner. A simple nod of the head after the sign sequence is finished is effective.
 - Also signal the number of outs. Have the player return the number if you like.
 - Have the player check the outfield positioning. This will be important on balls hit that might allow for a 2 or 3 base advance or tag up situation.
 - More advanced players can also check with you as they return to the base after a foul ball. This technique helps to create tempo and lessen the opportunity for the opponents to pick your signs. As you can see the concept of pre pitch awareness is a constant no matter what part of the game you are involved with. In fact, your hitters should be coached to not step in the batter's box until the base runner establishes their lead. **Good habits begin in practice and must be repeated almost daily or as often as you practice.**

LEAD OFFS AT FIRST BASE

The components of the lead off relate to the age group you are coaching and the particular rules that govern your level. The three basic parts of the lead off are the primary lead; the secondary lead and the power back to the base. If your league does not allow leading off then the secondary lead and power back aspects will be your main emphasis.

1. **Primary lead** – This initial part of the lead off occurs right after the pre pitch sequence. Using your right foot, take a long but controlled side step towards second base and bring your left foot towards your right foot in a sliding motion. Repeat this 2 to 3 times more until you have reached a distance of 12 – 15 feet from the 1B bag. After the first step, be careful to maintain balance so you can dive back to the base in case of a pick off attempt. The runners' feet should not touch or be too close together. Either led off directly from the base or from the back edge. The player should be in an athletic position with his right foot opened to no more than a 45° angle. This foot position will help in attaining a good jump on a steal. The hands should be near the center of the body to facilitate quick lateral movement. Approximately 60% of the players' weight should be on his right leg. This allows quick reactions either back to the base or to initiate a crossover step to start the steal of 2B. The runner must focus on the pitcher once he is off the base. Make sure the runner knows where the ball is on all occasions. Being the victim of the hidden ball trick is a rather embarrassing situation. The focus on the pitcher serves some very important purposes that will serve the runner well.

- Allow for a quick reaction on a pick off attempt.
- Allow for a quick reaction into the secondary lead when the pitch goes to the plate.
- Tracking the flight of the pitch will allow the runner to react quickly on either a ball in the dirt or a passed ball/wild pitch. And
- Tracking the ball will allow the runner to determine whether the batted ball will be in the air or on the ground.
- These four possible reactions hold true at all the bases, not just first base. The mindset of the runner should be geared towards advancing to the next base and beyond. Ball awareness is the first key component to aggressive base running.

Primary leads when facing a left handed pitcher, especially when you are not sure if he has a good move can be adjusted in some of the following ways:

- Shorten your primary lead to a distance where your player can easily get back to the base on a pick off attempt (7 – 10 feet).
- Maintain 12 –15 foot lead but narrow the base of your feet and take a small jab step back towards 1B on the first movement by the pitcher. If he picks, continue back to the base. If he pitches, move directly into your secondary lead.

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- Shorten your lead and give a head and shoulder fake towards 2B. If the pitcher is a reader, looking for movement, this movement will frustrate him and give you and your runner's valuable information.
- 2. **Secondary lead** – The secondary lead for young players is a challenge because of the fear factor of getting picked off by the catcher and not understanding the importance of gaining ground and momentum towards the next base. The secondary lead is nothing more than a series of 3 – 4 shuffle steps that begin when the player has determined that the pitcher has committed his delivery to home plate. A key component to the secondary lead is again, tracking the ball to the hitting area and determining if the ball is in the air, on the ground, caught by the catcher, in the dirt or past the catcher for a passed ball or wild pitch. This means that the runners' eyes and head need to stay as level as possible during the shuffle steps. The final shuffle step should end with the weight of the player 70 – 80% on his right leg as the ball passes through the hitting zone. This allows the player to be able to either continue his advance to the next base or push off and return to 1B. **This is true at all bases.** Again, know where the ball is and react accordingly. The secondary lead also sets up the delay steal, which we will deal with in a later section.
- 3. **Power back** – This concept is used when the catcher has received the ball. At the end of the final shuffle step, the runner has recognized that the pitch has been caught, he then pushes off his right foot, crosses over and explodes back to the base. Eyes on the catcher and the ball, slowing down and gaining control once he determines there will be no pick off attempt by the catcher. An important coaching point: many runners want to end their secondary too soon and begin the power back. Stress the importance of finishing the secondary as the ball is being caught.
- 4. **Dive back** – A necessary component to the power back and the primary lead is the possibility of a pick off attempt. Diving back to the base, on your belly is often necessary. Usually the dive back consists of a cross over step and then a dive. The target of the dive should be the left front corner of the first base bag. The right hand should be used to contact the base. Leads that are either straight off the base or start from the back edge will make this dive back more effective. A point for more advanced runners that helps to convince umpires of a safe call is to stress that their elbow remains slightly bent as the hand contacts the base. This gives the umpire the visual that the play wasn't as close as it might have been.
- 5. **Stand up return** – Returning to the base when standing should be done by going directly to the base and contacting the base with your right foot. Continue momentum on to or over the base. This will make it more difficult for the 1B to catch throws that are inside fair territory or up the line. Also there is less chance of the runner falling or slipping off the base. There is a safety factor on the direct return to the base in that it only exposes soft muscle tissue to a throw instead of the face and chest if you choose the left foot and spin away technique employed by some runners.

ADVANCE TO SECOND AND WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ARE THERE

1. **From first to second** – First you must determine what happened to the ball. Listed are some of the most common situations:
 - 🏠 GB hit in front of the runner – force out at 2B. Slide directly into the base.
 - 🏠 Fly balls – find it and react to the situation. Tag up; stop, read and return; pick up 3B coach and either hold, return or advance.
 - 🏠 GB hit behind runner for a base hit – pick up coach, react to signal from coach.
 - 4. GB hit to the second baseman – stop and avoid a tag thus preventing an easy double play.
 - 🏠 Bunt play – be sure bunt is on the ground. This is done during the secondary lead.
 - 🏠 Line drive – see it through the infield. Decision is made during the secondary lead.
2. **At second base** – Many of the same principles apply at second as they did at 1B. Pre pitch sequence should be the same. The primary and secondary leads and power back/dive back principles apply with some variations.
 - 🏠 **Primary lead** – Because of the longer distance and time needed to complete a pick off attempt at 2B, the primary lead will start 5 – 6 steps directly off the base in a straight line towards 3B. This primary lead is also called the safety zone. By this we mean that the runner can safely cross over step and dive back to the base without the coach giving any verbal warning. The primary lead can be extended if the defense is not doing an active job of holding the runner close to the base or if you have a skilled base runner that has the reactions to return to the base safely from a 7 – 8 step primary lead. In some youth leagues you will have the second baseman actually hold the runner on, similar to what the 1B does. Although not considered sound fundamental baseball because the 2B gives up quite a bit of his defensive range, this does happen. The safety zone concept will still be used and a shorter lead is not needed. The runner is responsible for reading the pitcher. The third base coach is responsible for reading the second baseman and the shortstop. If the back foot of the pitcher is raised, the runner will crossover and dive back to the base. The runner will be safe regardless of what the infielders do. With two outs you can have your runners deepen their lead by 3 to 4 steps (12 feet) and direct their secondary lead angled towards the third base bag. This will enhance their route around 3B and give them a slight advantage in scoring on a base hit or error. Studies have shown this type of lead to be faster for the runner to advance to the plate.
 - 🏠 **Secondary lead** – The secondary lead will again be longer than at 1B because of the increased distance for pick off attempts. 2 to 3 shuffle steps, some times initiated by a lead step with the right foot, will get the runner in good position to be able to advance to home plate on a base hit. The

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secondary lead will also be an important part in reading the ball in the dirt and giving the runner momentum to allow for an effective advance.

- 3. Power back** – As the runner sees the ball enter the front hip of the hitter he should be completing his secondary lead. The power back does not need to be a “panic retreat” to the base. With their eyes on the ball from release and focus on the catcher the power back movement will be controlled and effective. The runner must keep his eyes on the baseball until he safely reaches the base. There is a tendency for young players to give up on their secondary too soon and start the power back early. Practice with a pitcher and catcher and middle infielders in controlled situations will help your runners to grasp these concepts.

4. Coaching points

- ➊ Advance to 3b in the following situations: ground ball hit directly at the runner or towards 2B; or on slow rollers, topped balls or bunts where the third baseman charges the ball.
- ➋ Turn and face the left fielder on routine fly balls. Be far enough off the base to advance if the ball is dropped or misplayed. But be close enough to return to the base if the ball is caught. The depth of the fly ball will determine the runners’ distance from the base.
- ➌ Leads that are directly off the base between 2B and 3B create a shorter distance that makes steals of 3B more effective and should be used when there is a force out possibility at 3B.
- ➍ With less than 2 outs and a fly ball hit to either the gap in right center, possibly over the CF head or the RF head, have the runner be close enough to the base to tag up but far enough off to advance to home if the ball is not caught. This usually means being about 4 to 5 steps off the base (approximately 15 feet). Adjustments can be made according to your players’ ability, speed and reaction time. “Get off as far as you can and still get back.”
- ➎ With 2 outs the runner should be geared to advance as the bat of the hitter starts to move into an actual swing. This anticipation will really help in scoring runners from 2B with 2 outs.
- ➏ With 2 outs and a ground ball to the infield have your runners “wheel” or continue on to home plate. Any over throws, errors or plays where the first baseman gets caught up in questioning the umpire on a disputed call can give you the opportunity to steal a run. If you move down the line with your runner you can always throw up the stop sign if he can’t safely advance.
- ➐ Recognition of balls in the dirt and passed balls/wild pitches, are more difficult from second base. Incorporate base running at 2b (actually at all bases) during blocking drills with your catchers. The read that is most difficult is the ball that kicks off to the side of the catcher and the ball that gets behind the catcher. Combining the block drills and base running is excellent practice for both groups and effective use of practice time.

- 📌 A good rule of thumb to help your players determine whether to tag up or stay off the base is: If the outfielder's face is away from the infield on a fly ball, "go as far as you can". If the outfielder's face is facing the infield on a fly ball, "tag up."

ADVANCING TO THIRD BASE AND WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GET THERE

- 1. Advancing from 2B to 3B** – As previously mentioned, the speed and direction of the batted ball are key determinates for your base runner's decision. Instinct and repetition in practice and game situations will enhance the reaction and decision making of your base runners. Read and recognize is probably a clear and concise way to describe the mental approach to base running. Reactions often lead to a poor decision by the base runner. Getting doubled off on a fly ball or line drive can be attributed to a "reaction." Reads and recognition are the result of practicing correct fundamentals at every practice. As a coach you cannot give verbal signals or hand signals for every base running situation. Developing game type practice situations for base running takes planning and a commitment to make base running a priority. Ground balls directly at the base runner or towards 2B are usually automatic advancement opportunities. Ground balls that are topped, slow hit or a bunted ball that causes the 3B to come get the ball and leave the area of 3B are also advancement opportunities. Reading the ball off of the bat at the end of the secondary lead is critical for successful reads off the bat. On ground balls hit directly at the SS or to his right the runner should freeze and read, retreating under control towards the second base bag. On some occasions and with runners with good speed, where the SS does not check the runner or makes a poor throw, the runner might be able to advance to 3B. Be careful here. Giving up an out by the man in scoring position can prove costly. On base hits to left field the runner must assume he will score and rely on the third base coach to stop him. Do not have your runners "tip toe" around the base in a non aggressive manner. Ground balls back to the pitcher can be confusing for young players. A pre pitch reminder from you to see the ball go by the pitcher will help. Running on this type of ground ball usually results in a needless out. Flares to right field, especially down the line, require your runner to be in a position to advance. The "panic retreat" will work to the runners' disadvantage. Have the runner maintain control and be close enough to return to the base if the ball is caught. Tag up only on balls that are hit deep enough for advancement. This usually means fly balls hit deep to the left center field gap, over the center fielder's head or to the right center gap or deep to right field.
- 2. At third base** – Being a base runner at third base creates some unique opportunities. For one, you are only 90 feet from scoring a run and you have a variety of ways to accomplish this most important of baseball feats.
 - 📌 **Primary lead** – Against a RH pitcher you should use the same fundamentals as if you were at first base. Most of the time the third baseman will not be holding you on the base, so a 12 – 15 foot lead is fine. If the 3B decides to

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hold your runner, shorten your lead to a distance of 8 –12 feet or lead off the same distance as the third baseman is from the base. The lead off in any situation is always in foul territory. Having your runners close to the foul line but still be foul territory will shorten the distance to home plate. This is important when trying to score on passed balls, wild pitches or balls in the dirt. “Just foul” is a good way to describe this concept. Remember that a RH pitcher has the same advantages as the LH pitcher does at 1B, especially if the 3B holds the runner in a pick off position. Against a LH pitcher the runner has the ability to maximize his lead to the 15-foot distance. The threat of a pick off is minimized because the LH pitcher has his back to the runner. All other basics stay the same.

Secondary lead – The secondary lead is critical because of the closeness of the runner to home plate and the opportunity for scoring with out a hit or the ball being put in play. The first step is made with the right foot towards home plate, remaining in foul territory. Follow with the left and then the right again. (A right, left, right sequence.) The final part of the secondary is adding 2 shuffles towards home plate. At the end of the secondary, 90% of the runners weight should be on his right foot. His eyes should have tracked the pitch from release to the hitting area or the catcher’s glove. With the majority of his weight on his right foot the runner is position to advance on pitches that get through the catcher. The important coaching point here is to get your players to finish the secondary and read the pitch. Do not retreat too early towards 3B. The pace of the secondary lead needs to be controlled so that the runner completes it as the pitch enters the front hip area of the hitter and that the weight on to the right foot allows for a quick reaction. Young players get impatient and want to retreat to the security of the 3B bag in too much of a hurry. Reading and reacting to the result of the pitch requires practice and repetition. Here are some of the reads and coaching points to give your players:

1. The release point of the pitch gives you a great early clue as to what the result will be. The angle of the pitch will show a ball in the dirt or a pitch going over the head of the catcher.
2. Watching for the catcher going to his knees for a potential block is another read that your runners can learn to anticipate.
3. Your players can learn to read the angle or direction that the ball leaves the bat.
4. Down angle off the bat means a ground ball. Depending on your level of play you might want to have a call or signal to your runner before the pitch regarding his break to HP on a down angle. Usually one out is a good time for this strategy, regardless where the infielders are playing. Of course the score and inning will determine your strategy.

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5. Line drives, especially those hit towards third base are going to be difficult to read and then react back to the base. With less than 2 outs all balls in the air require your runner to start back to the base. Have your players see the line drive through the infield. Assuming that a line drive will not be caught can prove to be costly process.
 6. Fly balls or those that leave the bat in an upward direction require an immediate reaction back to the third base bag. This is true for fair and foul balls hit into the air. The pre pitch awareness we have talked about already will serve you well on reads at 3B. Knowing the depth and position of the outfielders is critical. Tagging on foul balls is sometimes ignored. Where else do you have to go? A tag up on a foul ball can often surprise the defense.
 7. Tag up techniques are simple but often are not taught correctly. At 3B you need to have your players watch the ball and the catch. The lag time for you (the coach) being their eyes, can be costly in delayed reactions to the catch and the increased possibility of the runner leaving early or being confused. **The tag up process is as follows:**
3. **Return to the base as you are locating the ball** – In fact return to the base on all fly balls and line drives. If the ball is down the left field line or in foul territory in left field, the runner should contact the base with his right foot. He should be in an athletic position ready to explode off the base towards home plate. His head and eyes should be turned so that he can clearly see the outfielder. He should time his break off the base with the ball as it enters the glove of the outfielder. If the fly ball is any other place on the field, the runner should have his left foot in contact with the base and follow the previously mentioned techniques. To ensure that the runner does what you want him to do, a verbal signal should be given prior to the catch. YES, would mean tag and advance to home plate. NO, would mean tag, stay on the base, and do not advance. BLUFF would mean tag and then break 2 –4 hard steps towards home plate, but do not advance unless there is a bad throw. This bluff technique can be used when there is also a runner on 1B and you want the outfielder to throw home, allowing the runner on 1B to have a chance to advance to 2B and into scoring position. If the outfielder falls for the bluff and airmails a throw over the backstop, you look like a genius. School your players to be heads up for opportunities to score when home plate is left without anyone close to it and the ball is in play. Examples can be the pitcher either not covering or being late in covering HP on a wild pitch or passed ball, the catcher putting his mask back on away from the plate, over throws on plays at the plate and position players going back to their positions and the catcher still near the backstop.
 4. **Return to the base when the pitch is caught** – The majority of reads at third base occur after the catcher successfully catches the pitch. The technique that is used is as follows:

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- At the completion of the secondary lead the runner is in an athletic position with up to 90% of their weight on their right foot.
- As the runner recognizes the pitch being caught he pushes off on the right foot towards 3B. The push off should move him into fair territory. The runner should “stay tall” to make the catcher’s throw more difficult.
- The first few steps should be in the power back mode. These quick steps will help avoid a pick off attempt. This creates a more difficult throwing lane for the catcher if he attempts to pick off the runner.
- The runner should maintain eye contact with the catcher and the ball as he retreats to the base. Be mindful of the catcher’s arm strength and desire to show it off. Be alert for the catcher making a poor or uncatchable throw to the pitcher.
- Turning you back on the catcher and the ball will make a possible run-scoring advance to home improbable.
- The base coach should be responsible for the third baseman. The third baseman’s move towards the base should cause a loud “BACK” command to the runner.

STEALING A BASE

Base stealing is a progression from the fundamentals of the primary lead and secondary lead (in the case of the delay steal) to recognizing and reacting to the pitchers timing and delivery. In leagues where you cannot steal until the ball crosses home plate (LLB and other youth leagues), stealing a base is related to the speed of the runner or the weakness of the catcher’s arm. In levels of baseball where you can lead off and steal at will or at least on the sign given by the coach, breaks, leads and reaction of the runner are the areas where, you the coach, need to spend your time. Running speed helps but as mentioned previously, speed is not the most important ingredient in stealing a base.

1. Stealing Second Base

- Establish the primary lead with proper fundamentals as mentioned in the previous section on leads.
- Have an aggressive mind set. Get a good, functional lead and the only out you even consider is the one at 2B. Pick offs are of no concern.
- Establish confidence in your runner by repetition of leads and breaks in practice against both RH and LH pitchers.
- Use a stopwatch on your runners, timing their first move through the second base bag without a slide and then with a slide. Compare the times with the following benchmark: 1.4 seconds for the ball to get to the catcher, and then add 2.2 seconds for the ball to arrive at 2B. Any running time faster than the combined time of 3.6 seconds will get a safe call at second. Remember that

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3.6 seconds accumulated by the P and C is a time that is considered an average MLB time. If your runners are completing the steal, with the slide, in 3.6, keep running.

- First movement – For the RH pitcher the first movement occurs with the front heel being lifted as the pitcher starts his delivery to HP. Some pitchers will shift their weight to their base leg as they begin their motion to the plate. Look for this in young pitchers. This shift gives the runner a big advantage. For the LHP the first movement is also the foot or knee of the leg closest to HP. A backwards weight shift is also common in young pitchers. A key coaching point with LHP is the recognition of the common or “Book” move that many employ. This simply means that the pitcher will look towards home and pick to first, or looking towards first and then throw to HP.
- Maintain effective running form from the first move through the start of the slide. Attain top speed within the first 3 – 4 steps.
- If the pitcher throws to 1b as you start to steal continue to 2B and force the 1B to make an accurate throw and the SS to make the tag. Stopping is not your best option.
- NO JUMP, NO STEAL. Even with the steal sign given by the coach, the runner should not go if he has not gotten a good jump or start in his reaction to the pitcher.

2. Stealing Third Base

- Your primary and secondary leads with proper fundamentals are to be employed in this situation.
- Remind your runners that the pickoff is less a threat here because of the increased distance and timing of the throw from the pitcher.
- Timing is of the essence for the steal of 3B. Your runner should look to maintain some movement to increase his ability to maximize his jump. A shuffle of the feet or a step towards 3B as the pitcher turns his head towards the plate will help to create movement.
- As a coach look for a pitcher that only looks once at the runner or shows a pattern of looks. This is easier for the runner to time. Also, if the SS and 2B do not hold your runners close or make little effort to create a fear of the pickoff, the steal will be much easier.
- The old baseball adage that the 1st or 3rd outs in an inning should not be made at 3B applies to stealing third base. Your runner is in “scoring” position when he is on 2B. Use your knowledge of your players’ abilities to make the decision to steal third base. Usually one out is the best time to steal the base.

3. Stealing Home

- One of the most exciting plays in baseball is the steal of home. This play is rarely used at the MLB level but has a place at the youth and amateur levels. Admittedly this play is a gamble, a roll of the dice but it can work.
- The best opportunity to steal home comes with a LH pitcher on the mound and he is in the wind – up. The slower the wind – up, the better. If he does not

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- check or make eye contact with the runner at the beginning of his wind –up the opportunity increases.
- The RH pitcher with a slow wind up presents another opportunity also. The one disadvantage with the RH pitcher is he has a better opportunity to see the runner break to the plate.
 - Walking lead – Your runner needs to create movement and timing. A walking lead means that movement to the plate is continuous while the runner creates his timing. Start the walk as soon as the pitcher has both feet on the pitching rubber.
 - The coach will give the runner on 3B a verbal signal such as: “Time him.” This alerts the runner to the possible steal attempt.
 - The runner should then give a sign back to the coach that he has the confidence and his timing is ready. A nod or a brushing of the hand across the chest will give the coach a heads up.
 - A sign then needs to be relayed to the hitter that a steal of home is occurring.
 - The hitter should move closer to the plate and back in the box. Make it difficult for the catcher to get to the plate to make the tag.
 - You have the option of having your hitter swing through the pitch, staying high in the strike zone. This action will slow down the catcher and possibly cause him to be distracted and miss the pitch. Your runner should be sliding, so he will not be in jeopardy of being hit by the bat. Catcher’s interference is also a possibility when the hitter swings through (not making contact) the pitch. Do not have your hitter swing through with 2 strikes and 2 outs, for obvious reasons.
 - The 3B coach needs to be alert for the positioning of the third baseman. The further away he is from the base increases the opportunity to successfully steal home.
 - Games have been won with this play. It is a great momentum shifter. How much of a gambler are you?

SLIDING

The ability to slide and the desire to slide are both important ingredients in developing sound, aggressive base running. Sliding is a necessity not only in possibly avoiding an out on the field but also for avoiding injury on the field. There are three types of basic sliding techniques we will discuss, the bent leg slide , the bent leg slide with a pop up and the head first slide. These are the basics you will need to teach your players. There are also three reasons that a player will slide in a game situation: 1. To avoid over running a base; 2. to avoid a tag and 3. To break up a double play. In all cases once the decision has been made to slide, the player cannot change his mind. Indecision can and will lead to injury.

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1. **Preparing your players to slide safely** – Building confidence is the first step. Player's will be more confident when they feel comfortable. Have your players sit on the ground with their right leg bent and their left leg extended over the top of the bent right leg. They will form the figure 4 with their legs. Now have them switch their leg positions. One of the positions will feel more natural and comfortable than the other. The more comfortable position will be the basis for their bent leg slide.
2. **Practice conditions for teaching the bent leg slide** – To continue the confidence factor consider the following suggestions as you introduce the bent leg slide:
 - Have the players start either without shoes or wearing trainers. This will avoid catching a spike in the ground that could cause injury.
 - Wear thick pants or possibly two pair, along with sliding shorts . This will reduce the potential for abrasions.
 - Slide on grass that is mowed and even damp.
 - Slide on a long piece of cardboard that can be obtained at an appliance or mattress store.
 - Slide on a smooth, polished gymnasium floor. With out shies is your best option in this situation. You can even put down a blanket in this situation.
 - Put a loose, unattached base at the end of the sliding area. This is an important reference point and will help the player slide at the proper distance from the base.
 - In some cases you and your assistant coach might have to each hold the forearm of the player as he is running. You will then help the player start his controlled fall into the sliding position.
 - Have all of your players assume the finished position on the ground prior to starting the sliding practice. Have them be aware of the part of their body that is in contact with the ground. The contact area should be over a large portion of the thigh, lower leg and buttocks. This is a valuable teaching tool.
3. **Teaching the bent leg slide** – The following teaching points need to be made to your players:
 - The straight leg is slightly flexed at the knee. This important because the leg will give and absorb the shock as it contacts the base.
 - The foot of the straight leg will be 6 –10 inches off the ground. The heel of the foot should be flexed upwards so that the cleats will not touch the ground.
 - The bent leg should contact the ground as a unit, all at one time. Have your players strive to keep this leg parallel to the ground.
 - The player should throw his hands up as he begins his slide. This movement will cause him to start the controlled fall.
 - The upper body will be extended backwards to a position where the shoulder blades will be 6-8 inches above the ground.

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- The buttocks will remain in contact with the ground. The players chest, face and belt buckle will be facing the sky. Movement or rolling to the side will be the cause of abrasions known affectionately in baseball as a “strawberry”.
- The chin of the player will be tilted towards his chest. This allows for effective body positioning as well as the opportunity to see an over throw.
- The leg that will be bent will start the controlled fall. The player will push off this leg at the start of the slide.
- The foot of the flexed straight leg will relax and lower to make contact with the base.
- **IMPORTANT** – Have your players start their sliding a good 10-15 feet before the base. Sliding too late is a major cause of injury. Practicing on the grass or on cardboard will give a much faster slide than the dirt of a field will allow. Make your players aware of the differences.

4. **Teaching the bent leg slide with a pop up** – This slide is a variation of the bent leg slide except the player will slide slightly closer (3-5 feet) to the base and end up using his momentum to stand up at the completion of the slide.

This slide is used in the following situations:

- When the player is in danger of over running the base. Usually this occurs when there is either no play going to be made on the runner or if he is going to be safe by a large margin.
- When the player sees a possible bad throw as he approaches the base and will need to advance.
- When the player wants to get to the base quickly in a force out situation.

Specific points for the pop up slide

- Start the slide 3 to 5 feet closer to the base
- Keep your upper body more erect. The center of gravity or balance point will over the buttocks and hips.
- The base is contacted by the instep of the extended leg.
- At contact with the base the leg is firm and will cause the body to be thrust upwards into a standing position. The slide needs to be aggressive for this to occur.
- The player should have his head up and either locate the ball and get direction from the base coach.

5. **Teaching the head first slide** –First let’s look at the advantages and disadvantages of the head first sliding technique.

1. Advantages

- It makes sense that a forward movement is going to get you to the base quicker than the controlled fall away from the direction you are running. The head first slide has been shown to get the runner to the base faster.

- It is a safer slide if done properly.
- It allows the runner to avoid a tag more easily. Moving your hand is a more controlled action than trying to move your foot to avoid a tag. Responding to pick off attempts should always be done with a head first slide (if a slide is needed).
- You can see the glove and ball more easily. Your eyes are in a better position.
- The aggressive head first slide can possibly sway the umpire to make a safe call.

2. Disadvantages

- The runner will have a more difficult time getting to his feet to advance to the next base on the over throw
- The danger of head injuries if your player either tries to break up a double play or if he slides head first into the catcher who is blocking home plate.

3. Techniques for the head first slide

- The head first slide is actually a glide. Your players should have the feeling that they are gliding on top of the water. It is not a dive, leap or flop.
- The player should start his transfer of weight forward approximately 12-15 feet from the base. Usually the head first slide will generate more body speed and travel time on the ground.
- As the player's body lowers and his weight moves forward the final push will be made with one leg. He should feel the glide start at this point.
- The player's body should be close to the ground and his arms starting to extend.
- The player's arms should be stretched forward with a slight bend in the elbows. The head and eyes should remain up so he can see the base and the ball entering the area.
- The player's chest, arms and legs should be one unit, parallel to the ground.
- The forearms, chest and thighs should contact the ground together, again parallel to the ground.
- The player's hands should catch or grab the base. This will help the player avoid jamming his fingers into the base.
- IMPORTANT – watch for players who try and break or slow their glide with their hands. This can cause a serious wrist injury. The same can be said for player's who land with their knee's first. Bruises and sprains will occur

6. Related Base running points

- 📌 Teach your players to run with their head and eyes up and either focused on the ball, the next base or the base coach.
- 📌 Have your players look for lazy outfielders. You can steal a base on an outfielder that jogs after a ball or throws rainbow throws back to the infield.
- 📌 Stretch your player's limits in practice. The best way to instill aggressive base running is to do it in a risk free environment – that's practice, not the game.
- 📌 Include base running in all parts of your offensive practices. Make it a quality inclusion, not a jog-a-thon.
- 📌 If you allow jogging to 1B on routine fly balls or less than 100% effort on what should be hard 90's, blame yourself for the team's poor, non – aggressive base running.
- 📌 Emphasize the risk and reward of aggressive base running. Take the risk in practice and the reward in the game.
- 📌 Have your backside runners (usually the batter runner or the runner on 1B) learn to read the ball as it leaves the hand of the outfielder. You will be able to tell if the ball is going to be over the cut – off man's head and then be able to advance.
- 📌 On base hits, the further the ball is away from the batter runner, the bigger and more aggressive the turn should be. Make the outfielder stop the base runner. Do not assume that every ball will be fielded cleanly or that the outfielder is hustling to the ball.
- 📌 Emphasis on reacting to balls in the dirt (BID) should be a major focus of your base running program. This is important at any level.
- 📌 Do not umpire. Run every ball out until the umpire tells you it is foul.
- 📌 Have the base runner check with the base coach or the umpire if he does not know if he was called out or safe. Do not ask or trust your opponent for the answer. Do not leave the base until the umpire or coach tells you to do so.
- 📌 On bunted balls, stay with your secondary until you see the ball on the ground.
- 📌 With a runner on 2B and a bunt is laid down, remind your runners that they do not have to run. The bunt directly back to the pitcher can turn into a needless out at 3B.
- 📌 Know where the ball is at ALL times. Be on the base if you are uncertain.
- 📌 Teach your players how to slide. The simple bent leg slide, practiced on the grass without shoes, is a must. This will prevent injury and outs!
- 📌 Have your players sit on the grass with one leg extended and the other bent underneath, forming the number 4. Their hands and arms should both be up in the air, their hands in a loose, clenched fist. The head should be leaning forward slightly, which prevents the upper body from lying down. Then have them switch leg positions. Whichever one feels more comfortable and natural

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will be their dominant, natural side. Have them practice their sliding from this side.

- Practice running form. Not every player is fast but most can get faster with proper, efficient running form. Keeping all body parts moving in a straight line is a good beginning. A track coach or former runner can be a valuable resource.
- Keep your players hands off their helmets. A natural reaction for some players is to instinctively put their hands on the helmet as they go back to a base as a throw is coming. Fingers trapped between two hard objects usually come out worse for the wear.
- Make your conditioning base running practice. This will then achieve a two fold purpose – better conditioned players and better base runners.
- Combine your pitchers, catchers and base runners in drills for steals, pick offs and bunt plays. Simulating game situations is a key step to improving performance.
- Practice with your base coaches. Situations such as advancing from 1B on the over throw, advancing from 1st to 3rd, 2nd to Home, and all situations at 3B. The situation with multiple base runners and proper use of the base coaches is another situation that needs plenty of practice repetition. Get the players used to trusting and using the coach.

SELECTION OF DRILLS

BASE RUNNING DRILLS

1. **Hard 90** – Home plate to 1B. Have your players incorporate the techniques from getting out of the box through the breakdown past the base. Use the entire team. 3-5 reps per player.
2. **Short version of the hard 90** – start your players just over half way to 1B. Emphasize hitting the home plate side of 1B.
3. **Pre pitch sequence** – Three base runners at a time at 1B. Review finding the number of outs, know the score and inning, getting the sign, and locating the outfielders. More emphasis on this early in the season.
4. **Base hit route/aggressive turn** – put a bag, or other object at the distance towards 2B that you want your players to make an aggressive turn. Usually this 18-20 feet towards 2B. Put one coach in the first base box close enough to the line that the player must make a tight turn. Put another coach at the distance you want the turn to be. Your player must stay inside that coach to insure a tight turn.

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5. **Tag up drill at 3B** – The base runner completes his primary and secondary lead with a player or coach simulating a pitch. Another coach or player either throws or hits a fly ball to the outfield. The runner tags up with proper technique and then reacts to the coaches command which is made prior to the catch. The player must be looking at the ball/catch
6. **Multiple reaction drill at 3B** – The base runner completes his lead off routine. Simulated pitch from the mound. The coach has a ball and fungo. He either hits a ground ball, swings and misses or hits a fly ball. The runner reacts accordingly. You can do this drill with other base runners on other bases. Bases loaded, or runners on 2nd and 3rd are excellent variations of this drill.
7. **Game situations especially 2 ball** – The more game like the better carry over for your players. A vast number of variations can be involved here.
8. **Leads and breaks** – reaction drill that the entire team can do together. Coach or player will act as the pitcher. He will either simulate a pitch to the plate, a pick off or step off. Players will be down one of the foul lines in a line extending along the foul line.
9. **Combination steal drill** – Use your catchers, pitchers and middle infielders in live competition with your base runners. You can allow your pitcher to pick to 1B or just vary his timing. This drill incorporates a lot so assign coaches specific responsibilities.
10. **4 corner base running** – Combine this with bunting. Station your players in equal numbers at each base and bunting at home plate. Each base will have a specific base running technique to practice. Examples; at 1B the runners are seeing the ball on the ground before advancing. Anything in the air they will retreat to the base; at 2B the runners are reacting to bunts towards either side of the mound and freezing and retreating on bunts back towards the pitcher. If the batter bunts and misses the ball the runners at 1B and 2B will power back to the base; at 3B the runners are practicing the suicide squeeze techniques with only a 5 step advance towards home so they won't disrupt the drill. Allow 3 minutes for each group and then have them move to the next base.

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PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Most of us have seen base runners lose opportunities to advance or score. Most of us have seen runners advance in to needless outs and most of use have seen an aggressive base runner make our defense look inept. Base running is an often ignored and under coached part of the game. The intent of this section was to give you basic fundamentals that you can employ at a variety of age and skill levels. Teach your player's to slide correctly. Sliding is a key component to achieving aggressive base running A commitment to hustle and the game speed, best speed concept is the foundation. Once your players understand and become comfortable with 100% effort as a habit, and not as an after thought your base running will improve dramatically.

Who is responsible for the "buy in" by your players? I think you know. Committing practice time to base running is a choice you need to make. Obviously, the level of your players and the practice time you have will play an important factor in the development of your team. Starts with hustle, combine technique, add game like conditions in practice, and progress will be made. Be patient, be positive and reward those little victories.