

SPECIFIC SKILLS AND PLAYS (SQUIRT AND ABOVE)

This is a list of the essential skills and the plays that could be covered and worked on during the season. Whether you practice indoors or outdoors, the basic skills are the same.

Infielders

Footwork at the bases: force outs, tag plays, and double plays
Throwing to bases
Checking the runner
Fielding fundamentals
Grounders, including forehands and backhands
Pop-ups and communication
Diving
First and third situations
Fielding bunts

Pitchers

Fielding bunts
Throwing to bases
Running the ball to first
Covering home plate on a passed ball or wild pitch
Intentional walks
Pitchouts
Backup responsibilities

Catchers

Receiving balls and setting up
Blocking pitches in the dirt
Framing pitches
Pop-ups
Plays at the plate
Force outs
Tag plays (blocking the plate with a runner attempting to score)
Fielding bunts
Calling the game
Cut-offs
Throwing to bases
Pitchouts
Intentional walks
Passed balls

Outfielders

Grounders
Down and block like an infielder
On the charge
Fly balls
Sun balls
Drop step for balls over the head
Playing the fence
Line drives
Throwing to bases
Backup responsibilities

Team Skills

Throwing and catching fundamentals
Communication on all plays
Rundowns
Relays and cutoffs
Hitting
Bunting
Base running
Pick-offs

Infield Drills

From Defensive Softball Drills by Jacque Joseph

The drills in this chapter cover almost every possible infield situation, from routine grounders, fly balls, and footwork at the bases to special situations like fielding bunts and handling rundowns. Adjust each to the skill levels of your players to cover all of the essential infielder skills.

Angle Back With Cones

Purpose: To improve the middle infielders (2B & SS) footwork when fielding balls hit up the middle or in the hole.

Procedure

1. Set up cones to the right and left of the fielder. Place the cones approximately three steps behind and four steps to the side of the fielder. One tosser (or coach) per two players works best.
2. The fielder begins in ready position facing the tosser, who rolls ground balls to the outside of the cones.
3. The fielder must take a drop step back with the foot on the ball side and then turn and sprint around the cone to the spot. The objective is to cut the ball off and not allow it to get through the infield. By taking an angle the player allows the ball to travel farther, thus giving herself more time to get to it. The fielder can throw the ball back to the tosser or put it in a bucket.
4. Switch fielders on each ball, and have each player field 10-15 balls.

Key Point

Allow for the player to get around the cone and field the ball in the middle of her body instead of using backhand or forehand fielding techniques to field balls.

Variation

Once the players improve, hit the balls from home plate.

Five-Ball Drill

Purpose: To practice footwork and releasing the ball quickly for the throw. An intense conditioning element is also a part of this drill.

Procedure

1. This drill can be used with any of the infielders in a variety of situations. For each position, place five balls in a line in an area where that player would likely field balls. For example, to help the third baseman practice fielding bunts, set up five balls in a line extending from the foul line toward the pitchers mound approximately 10 feet away from home plate, where the fielder would pick them up for a bunt.
2. The third baseman starts in her normal ready position and depth, then runs to surround the first ball and throws it to first. She then runs back to her starting position and quickly turns back to field the next ball. Repeat until the fielder throws all five balls.
3. Place the balls in similar areas for the first baseman and catcher. For middle infielders, place the balls to one side of each player and have them practice their throws to each of the bases.
4. Each player fields and throws two sets of five balls placed in slightly different locations.

Variation

Two fielders can be fielding and throwing at the same time. For example, the first baseman can practice fielding bunts and throwing to first while the third baseman fields bunts and throws to second. Or the first and third basemen can work together to field balls and practice throws while the shortstop and second baseman do the same.

Pop-Ups Infielders

Purpose: To establish appropriate guidelines for fielders when pop-ups are hit in the infield.

Procedure

1. Place players in their infield positions and hit pop-ups in all areas.
2. The key is to communicate; someone must call the ball each time. Players should only call the ball by saying, Mine, mine! Once a player calls for the ball she must catch it, unless there is time for another player to call her off. If a player wants the ball that was already called, she must say, No, no, mine, mine!
3. Hit 2-3 pop-ups per position.

Key Points

Fly-ball priorities for infielders are listed next:

- The corners should catch anything hit in front of the base, whether fair or foul.
- The middle infielders should catch anything hit behind the base and fair. If the ball is hit just behind a base and is foul, the corner may have it.
- The pitcher should not catch anything outside of the circle.
- The catcher will handle anything hit directly behind the plate. If the ball is hit just in front of the plate area the catcher or corner can catch it.
- It really does not matter what term the team uses for calling the ball; they should just be consistent and loud.

Outfield Drills

From Defensive Softball Drills by Jacquie Joseph

This chapter includes drills to practice every outfield defensive situation, including grounders, routine and deep fly balls, line drives, and throwing correctly from the outfield. The outfield is a vital part of the defense at all levels.

Fly Balls Partner Toss

Purpose: To learn to stay back on a fly ball and develop momentum into the throw.

Procedure

1. The outfielder starts on the left field foul line facing fair territory, and another player (or the coach) stands approximately 5-10 feet slightly in front and to the side of the fielder. A third player stands directly across from the outfielder approximately 100-150 feet away and is the receiver of the throw.
2. The partner or coach tosses the ball in front of the fielder, high enough so that she has time to set up.
3. After the ball is tossed, the outfielder turns sideways with her feet at a 45-degree angle to the throwing target, left foot in front of right (for right-handers). The fielder brings her hands up, turning the glove slightly sideways so her thumb is parallel to the ground, and places her throwing hand on the side of the glove. The object is to set up the body to throw so when the ball is caught the player can throw quickly.
4. The fielder should stay behind the ball, wait for it to come down, catch the ball on her throwing side, and throw to the receiver.
5. Toss five balls to each fielder, then switch so the receiver is the fielder. Repeat twice.

Key Points

- The fielder must let the ball come down below her eyes.
- The fielder should catch the ball with both hands and make the throw in one smooth motion, like infielders do when running through the ball as they field on the charge.

Variation

• Have all of your outfielders line up at the foul line and rotate up one at a time. One player acting as a receiver stands 100-150 feet away. Each player rotates through to make five catches and throws.

Sun Balls

Purpose: To learn to catch a fly ball when playing in sunny conditions.

Procedure

1. Before the drill begins, each fielder should identify the sun's position. Fielders should put their gloves up slightly sideways and closed to shield their eyes from the sun. This will prepare them for the drill. This preparation also needs to be done in the game on sunny days.
2. Fielders can set up anywhere in the outfield where there is room. A partner tosses a ball in the air directly into the sun, and the outfielder holds up her glove as described in step 1.
3. If a fielder loses the ball in the sun she must look down and try to pick up the ball as it comes out of the sun.
4. Toss five balls and switch roles. Repeat twice.

Key Points

- Do this drill on a sunny day.
- Outfielders must learn to position themselves so that they are not looking directly at the sun ball but are instead using peripheral vision to locate it.
- Outfielders should wear visors when necessary.

Variations

- Start with partner tosses and then hit fly balls to each fielder.
- Run the drill with two outfielders in position. Hit sun balls between the two to help them learn to communicate when one player has a better line on the ball. The player whose vision is less blocked by the sun should catch the ball if possible and, at minimum, give directions to help her fellow outfielder to locate the ball and make the catch.
- The outfielders line up and rotate through one at a time while the coach tosses pop-ups.

Balls to Spots

Purpose: To teach outfielders to run to a spot and then find the ball. This skill is used for balls that the player immediately knows are over her head but that she can still catch. This drill includes a good conditioning element as well.

Procedure

1. Outfielders form a line at one of the starting positions (e.g., everyone lines up in left field). One outfielder is up at a time, and a coach is in front of the fielder. Prior to tossing the ball the coach picks a spot to the left or the right of the player, approximately 30 feet behind her, and shows the spot to the player. This spot should be within the range of a sprinting outfielder.
2. When the coach tosses the ball to the designated spot the player puts her head down (taking her eyes off the ball) and sprints to the spot she thinks the ball will be. Next, she turns to find the ball and catches it.
3. Toss 8-10 balls to a spot to the left of each outfielder and then repeat to the right.

Key Points

- Once an outfielder knows the ball is hit over her head, she must turn and sprint to the spot (with her head down), then look up to find the ball. Make sure the fielder looks for the ball early but not so early that she tracks the ball the entire way.
- The fielder should not run directly under the ball; she should try to keep it to one side or the other.

Variations

- Practice in all three outfield positions.
- The coach throws fungo balls from home plate or the pitcher's mound area.
- Practice the drill near the fence. If there is a fence to deal with the fielder should get to the fence first then find the ball. This is an advanced skill.