

BASE RUNNING DRILLS

3-2-1: Place three balls equal distance apart about three fourths of the way from third to home. Have a runner (team 1) and have a fielder on third base and one on 2nd base (team 2).

When you say "go", the runner must reach 2nd base before the fielder fields and throws the balls to the fielder at second base. All throws must be accurate. If the fielders get all balls to second base before the runner gets there, the fielders get 1 point. If the runner gets there first, they get 1 point.

Lots of fun!!

BASE

The runner is on the base in her ready position (ready for her lead off). Another player or coach is a short distance from her, in the base path from 1st to 2nd base. The coach holds a tennis ball at eye height. As the ball is dropped on a piece of flat wood, the runner leaves the base and attempts to catch the ball before it bounces off the wood a second time. The distance for this drill is determined by the skill level of the runners, but start out close so that she can easily catch the ball and slowly move back to challenge her.

BASERUNNING SITUATION

I've been ending practices with this drill for many years. It works with either baseball or softball.

Split the team in half and form two lines at home plate, one staggered ahead and inside the other. The coach stands at the pitcher's circle with two bats. When he (she) hits the bats together, the lead runners in both lines take off. One runs straight through first base as if she is beating out a groundball, the other makes a turn and continues into second. You now have runners at first and second and two lines of runners still at home. At the next crack of the bat, the drill continues in the same manner but the runner on second now rounds third and scores while the runner on first takes third. Now every base should be occupied. It continues again, with the runner on third tagging up and scoring. Two runners will now score each time the bats are hit together. They will then return to the end of the opposite line and the bases will always remain loaded.

The coach can gauge when the team has had enough and end the drill when the last player on line crosses home.

The drill allows for every baserunning situation, allows the coach to check running mechanics and proper turns and helps build stamina with short bursts. It's much more helpful than having the players continually circle the bases. You will find that the runner scoring from second will often chase the runner tagging from third home, making for a good game-type situation.

BELT

Resistance Drills Equipment required: A belt and a short length of rope (about 10-12 feet long).

Put the belt around the waist of a runner and tie the rope to the back of the belt. Have another player grasp the rope and stand behind the runner with the rope taut. Have the runner lean forward while the other player holds the rope to keep her from falling. The proper running position is at about a 5-10 degree angle off vertical with her feet pointing forward, the back foot about 6 inches behind and 6 inches to the right (or left) of the lead foot. With the help of the rope holder, have the runner get into her running position and when she is, say "GO".

The runner runs about 10 yards with the rope holder applying resistance. You do not want too much resistance, just enough to keep the runner in the proper running position. Do this 2 times then have the runner "free" sprint over the same distance while the rope holder is putting on the belt. Then switch positions.

OUT OF THE BOX

Out of the Box Drill: This drill is similar to the base drill, but this time the runner is a batter. The dropper is lined up a short distance from home plate in the basepath to 1st base.

Have the batter take a normal swing with a "bat" (use a fake bat, or top of a batting tee). As the "bat" enters the impact or contact zone, drop the tennis ball and have the batter run out of the batters box and catch the ball before it bounces on the wood a second time. Once again, start out at a short distance and increase the distance to challenge the batters.

NOTE: Make sure batters weight is balanced and not leaning forward or backward or she will take unnecessary steps to regain her balance before running for the ball. Also, watch the right arm and elbow (right handed batters). The proper movement is to drive the elbow back and outside the hip to initiate the running sequence. Finally, watch the "bat" to make sure she does not "whip" the bat back to the right side and then run. The "bat" should be dropped by the left hand after the right hand has released it.

This drill teaches two things. The first is to get out of the batters box quickly and with the least amount of steps and wasted movement. The second thing it teaches is to hit the ball and run. Not to HIT THE BALL, ADMIRE YOUR HIT AND THEN SAUNTER TO FIRST BASE.

THUNDER BALL

THIS IS A GAME WE USE AT THE END OF PRACTICE.

Have a fielder on first base and one on third base (team 1). Place a ball on a tee or soft toss it to a hitter (team 2). The hitter hits the ball and runs to as many bases as she can reach before both fielders have touched the ball. For each base she reaches before the fielders touch the ball, her team gets 1 point.

They all like this one!!

GAMES

FIRST AND THIRD

Split up your team into two teams and have the catcher on each team make up signs for her players. The other team runs the bases. One starts on first the other on third. The girl on first has three pitches to steal second base on and the team in the field can not let the girl score at home.

If the runner scores at home that team gets three points. If the runner scores at home and the girl is out at second the out doesn't count because the girl scored. If the girl scores at second base and the other is out at home then they get one point and have one out. The catcher calls the play before the pitcher pitches the ball.

The object is to stop the runner from scoring while trying not to just give the runner second base on an easy steal. Usually we play one or two innings and the losing team has to run sprints.

This drill really helps during the games and the girls feel more comfortable about the steal when there is a runner on third base. As well the catcher feels more comfortable throwing the ball down with a runner on third base.

LEAP FROG

We use this game to start the practice almost every night. It is fun and gets the blood moving.

Have your players lay on the ground in a circle with their heads toward the middle of the circle. Designate a player to start the action. When she starts, she gets up and runs over every player in the circle until she gets to an open spot (vacated by the first player she has run over) and then she lays down on the ground (usually falls down). After the starter has run over the FIRST player on the ground, SHE gets up and runs over every player until she finds an open spot (vacated by the FIRST player SHE has run over) and then lays down.

When played right, you will have 3 or 4 girls running over players and falling down at all times. The players love this game and it is a good warmup exercise.

PICKLE

Place two bases 40-60 ft. apart. Only three people are needed. One at each base and one to be the runner. I would recommend using tennis balls to avoid getting hurt.

The fielder with the ball should begin at the bag opposite the runner. Starting with his foot on the bag, the runner gets a 3-5 sec. lead toward the base in front of them. After they have touched the first base and gets a start back to the other base the fielder they just ran from throws the ball to the other fielder to try and tag the runner out. If the ball gets past the fielder or they drop it, the runner can turn around after touching that base and run back to the other. The runner would just go back and forth as many times they can until they get into a pickle. If the fielder catches the ball, they can run the runner back to the base like a real pickle situation in a game. The runner can not get credit for this base because they didn't touch the other base, yet.

The goal of this game is to touch the bases as many times as you can without being tagged out. The runner must keep track of how many times they touch the base before a fielder tags them out. When that runner gets out, they rotate positions so that the fielders can be the runner. After everyone has ran, they compare their scores (bases touched).

PICKOFF

This is a good drill for all aspects of stealing. Put players at each of the infield positions. Have the rest of the team put on helmets and line up at 1st base. The baserunners will each run the bases in this pattern: lead off, steal. Only one runner on the bases at time. The first runner gets ready on first. The pitcher pitches the ball and the runner takes a lead. The catcher attempts a pick-off at first and the runner tries to get back in time. On the next pitch the runner attempt to steal second and the catcher tries to throw her out. The runner proceeds with a big lead at second, stealing third and big lead off at third. The final pitch for that runner is a deliberate passed ball/wild pitch which gives the catcher and pitcher a chance to practice this play.

To encourage the runners to take big leads and to teach them what they can get away with we will place little pieces of candy in the dirt as a challenge. If they can grab the candy and get back safely, they can keep the candy. After they have done this drill a couple of times, allow the runners to do a "delayed steal" on their lead offs. If the catcher throws to first, the runners can attempt to go to second. This way the catchers learn to recognize the delayed steal and run the baserunner back.

The drill gives the catcher a lot of practice throwing to the bases, allows the infielder to practice positioning themselves for and putting on the tag, and allows the baserunners a chance to practice leading off, sliding, and themselves before practice officially started while the coaches were taking care of some paperwork. The coaches decided to just sit a watch them coach themselves.

SCRAMBLED EGGS

It is a great drill for sliding!!

Have 1/4th the players line up behind first base, 1/4th the players line up behind second base, 1/4 the players line up behind 3rd base, and 1/4th the players line up at home. You will need to have a dozen or so eggs (not hardboiled). Give 2 eggs (one for each

hand) to the first player in line at home. She has to run to first base and slide, with her hands up so as not to break the eggs. The first player in line at first base, gets the eggs from the runner and runs to second base and slides. This continues until all the players have run and slid.

You will be amazed how few (if any) eggs are broken.

SPRINTING

This drill is for conditioning and control.

Player set-up

A catcher stands between first and second base with a discard bucket. The rest of the team stands between third base and home with gloves.

Ball set-up

Place three balls on the first baseline, spacing them a few feet apart. Do the same on the second baseline. Place 5 balls in the center of the field, vertically between catcher and player.

Drill

This drill should be run one player at a time. The player sprints to any ball on the field, and throws it to the catcher. (If the throw is not good, the ball is replaced by another player for a second try.) They then sprint back to where they started, and go after another ball. This goes on until all of the balls are in the bucket. This drill should be tiring, and should be run at a sprint. Time the players if they need motivation. The other players on the team should be cheering on the runner.

THE RUNNING

It is also as old as the hills, but we use it almost every night in practice.

Have half of the team line up at second base and half the team line up at home. On the signal, one player from each team runs the bases until she reaches the base she started out at. When she gets there, she tags the next runner in line and she runs the bases. This is done until all the runners have run. Whoever reaches their base first wins. The other team has to pick up the bases.

This is usually the last thing we do at the end of practice.

THUNDER

This game has been played ever since the start of time. It is played with 2 teams. One team is at bat with a tee or soft-toss, the other team has one fielder on third base and one on first base. The batter hits the ball off the tee or from a soft-toss as hard as she can and runs as many bases as she can until BOTH fielders have touched the ball.

Keep score by counting bases reached before the ball is touched. After all batters have batted, switch sides.

TREES

We play at a location that has 1 field and quite a bit of open space. The open space had many trees spread out. Some were 15-20 feet apart while there were 2 trees that were 60-70 feet apart. The trees I picked were in a circle but they could be in any order. Get enough trees to make even teams. Get a stop watch and time how long it will take to go 2-3 times around. On the second go round players positioned themselves to locations where they would make throws in a game. You would be surprised on the improvement in time.

PROGRAM

VERTICAL LEAP

Vertical Leap Drills: Equipment required: 2 lengths of rope (about 15-20 feet long).

1. Static Jump: Have two players hold the rope LOOSELY in their hands at a height of the jumper's knees. From a stationary position facing the rope, have the jumper jump over the rope using her hands and legs to propel her over it. If she does hit the rope, instruct the holders to drop it. Next raise the rope to half way through the thigh. Then to the top of the thigh. Do this twice.

2. One Step Jump: Have the holders hold the rope at knee height and have the jumper take a step and jump over the rope with both feet (jump rope style). Raise the rope to half way through the thigh and to the top of the thigh.

3. Two Rope Jump: Have two sets of players hold two ropes. The first one is at the jumper's knees. The second rope is at mid thigh. Have the jumper stand in between the ropes and stretch out her arms. This is the distance between the two ropes. The jumper faces the first rope and takes a step and jumps over the first rope and immediately upon landing, she jumps over the second rope without taking a step. Do this twice. This drill improves vertical leap which is directly related to speed and quickness.

4. Lines on The Field: Equipment Required: Strips of cloth, small pieces of wood or chalk to make marks on the field (outfield). Have an area of about 60 feet to run in. Make lines (like hash marks) on the field indicating where players feet should be hitting as they leave the base or batter's box. The first 10 feet should be short, but getting longer as they build up speed. Place a marker at about the halfway point and tell the players that when they reach the marker to focus on pumping their arms faster. This drill will teach the proper way of defeating inertia by taking short steps at first and then pumping their arms to reach optimum speed.

NOTE: Watch for the proper arm position of 90 degree bend in the elbows. The hands go from chest to pocket. KEEP THE HANDS OUTSIDE THE EYES. Also, there is a direct correlation between the speed of the arms and the speed of the feet. As an instructional demonstration, have the players try to run slowly while pumping their arms as fast as they can. It doesn't work!!! The runner runs about 10 yards with the rope

holder applying resistance. You do not want too much resistance, just enough to keep the runner in the proper running position. Do this 2 times then have the runner "free" sprint over the same distance while the rope holder is putting on the belt. Then switch positions.

TIPS

BALLS OF THE FEET

I get a lot of e-mail asking how to improve speed to first base.

First of all, you must realize that the game of softball is played entirely on the balls of your feet, regardless of what position you play. There are only 2 times when your heels should hit the ground.

1. In between pitches when you are relaxing
2. In the dugout in between innings.

To generate more speed you must realize the dynamics of running. If you are running with your heels hitting the ground first, you are actually pulling the ground toward you. This is not generating any speed. When you run on the balls of your feet and leaning forward, you are pushing the ground away from you and this generates power and speed.

One of the best drills I have ever seen to improve strength in your stride (running stride) is to do static jumps. This is done by stretching a length of rope between two chairs or people (hold the rope very loosely). Hold the rope about waist high and from a standing start, on the balls of your feet, jump over the rope. You may have to start out lower, but get to the point where you can jump over a rope at waist high, then add a second rope a couple of feet away from the first. Jump the first rope and when you hit the ground, immediately jump over the second. This will improve your speed the first day you do it. Every day after that, you will see more and more speed.

The first few steps toward first base should be short, choppy steps and you must be still in a bit of a crouch and leaning forward. After about 10 feet, begin to straighten up just a bit and lean forward. When you reach almost half way to first base, begin to pump your arms as fast as you can. This will make your legs move faster, and don't stop until you go past first base.

The key to faster times out of the box and to first base is to run on the balls of your feet. Do the drill and I am certain your will be a faster runner.