

Developing Your Outfield

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Outcome Based Education and the OF

- } Coaches constantly face difficult decisions.
- } Which skills are important; which are not.
- } “Must” cover skills vs. “should” cover skills
- } People learn best when there is a clear relationship between practice and the activity
- } **Mangelnde Vorbereitung**
- } *Failure to Prepare Is Preparing to Fail*

So...knowing all of this, how do you prepare your outfielders? What do they need to know?



Toughest Plays for OF

- ✘ Charging ground balls
- ✘ Moving into a fly ball to throw out a runner
- ✘ Hitting a relay/cut-off man in the chest
- ✘ Going back without “drifting”
- ✘ Fielding “flares”
- ✘ Getting to the line to cut-off extra bases
- ✘ Going to a ball in straight lines; playing angles
- ✘ Cutting off balls in the gaps



Element 1: Developing “Baseball Sense”

- Environment
- Hitter’s Tendencies
- Bat Angle
- Pitcher
Strengths/Weaknesses
- Sound



Environment

Sun

Wind

Grass

Ground



Hitter's Tendencies

- What did he do his last AB?
- In BP?
- Last game?
- Other Keys -

4 Stance is it open-pull is it closed - opposite square-depends on where in the box		4 Position in Box in & up in & back square/normal backed off
4 Count 1-0 2-0 pull 3-0	0-1 1-2 opposite field 2-2	4 Size Watch BP



The Bat Angle

On a RH hitter – from LF

g LF ~ see barrel

g RF ~ ball gets in further

The OF feet won't move, but the upper body will



Your Pitcher

- § Favorite pitches when ahead or behind
- § set up a sign system
- § focus on front of the plate

- § Call out in practice - "low and away; up and in"
"inside/outside"



Sound and Other Things

React to the sound of the bat hitting the ball



Some random thoughts:

Ø In BP, play every 4/5 pitches for real (hard); relax on the others.

Ø Have Of call pitches during BP

Ø Take BP in the outfield!



Element 2 - Positioning OF

- } Pull OF

- } Deeper

- } Move with count

- } Opposite OF

- } Shallow

- } Take away "flares"

- } Most players have little power to oppo field

- } Straight away

- } Move with count



Center Fielder

} Shallow

- } More drop in front than go over heads
- } Consider the odds: take away a single or give up a double?
- } Makes it harder for runners to advance

} Why it works

- } CF is usually a good athlete
- } Balls get to corners a little faster
- } Coaches send runners from 2nd home on balls hit to CF more often than balls hit to RF.

GET THEM TO BELIEVE – how?

* Mark territory.



Element 3 – Teach the 7 Outfield Absolutes

- ✓ Always Know the Score
- ✓ Defend Your Turf
- ✓ Be Equipped
- ✓ Keep Moving
- ✓ Catch and Throw
- ✓ Think Ahead



...And the most important absolute!

} **COMMUNICATE!!**

} Especially on balls in the gaps

} CF goes low (below waist);

} corners high



How to Begin Training OFs

- ✓ “You gotta love BAD days”
- ✓ No Excuses
- ✓ Spend time working on ground balls



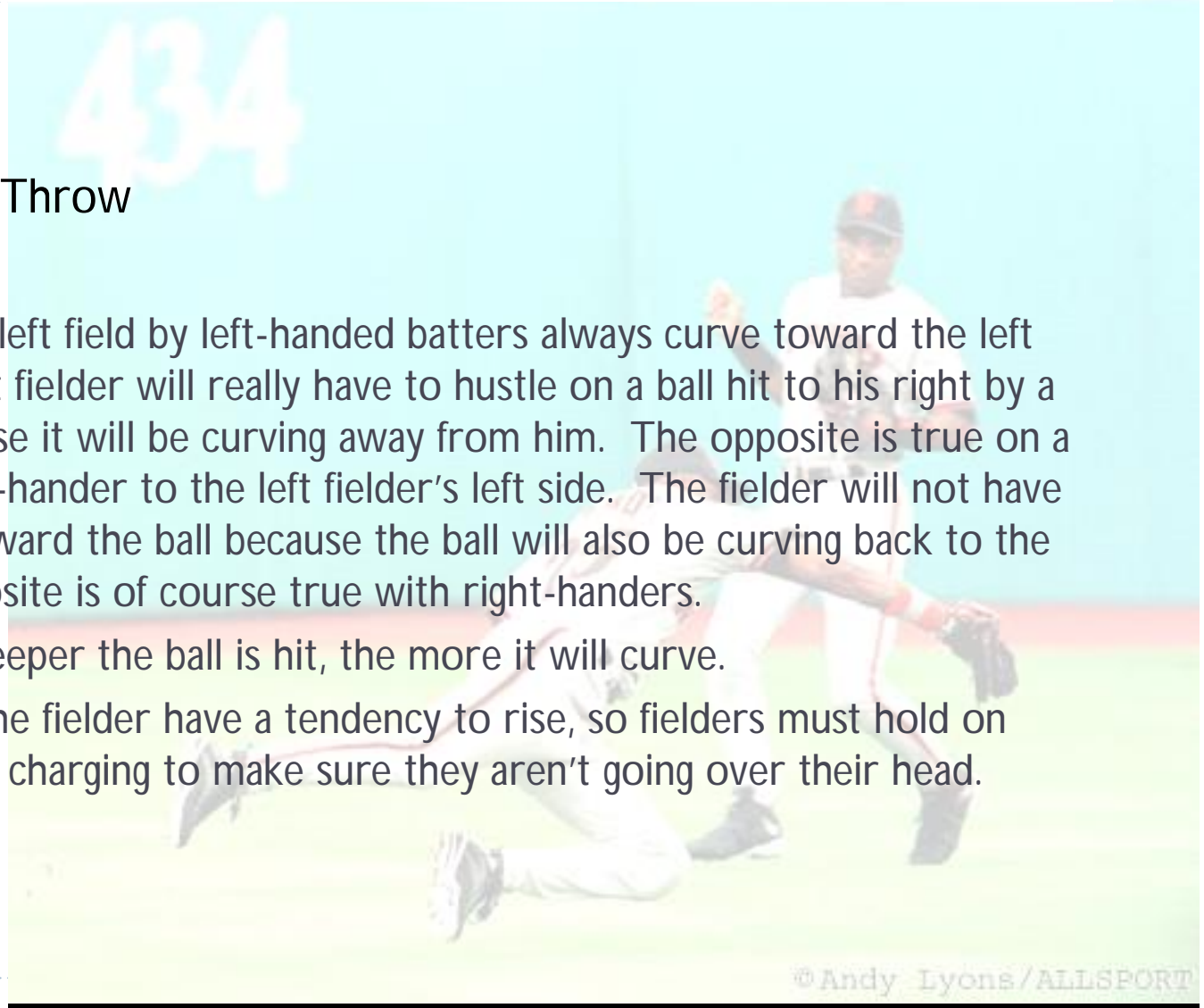
Consistency

- } Repetition, Repetition
- } Tool Box Drills



FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS

- § Running on toes
- § Drop Step
- § Reverse Pivot and Throw
- § Ball Flight Rules:
 - § Line drives hit to left field by left-handed batters always curve toward the left field line. The left fielder will really have to hustle on a ball hit to his right by a left-hander because it will be curving away from him. The opposite is true on a ball hit by the left-hander to the left fielder's left side. The fielder will not have to run as hard toward the ball because the ball will also be curving back to the fielder. The opposite is of course true with right-handers.
 - § The higher and deeper the ball is hit, the more it will curve.
 - § Balls hit right at the fielder have a tendency to rise, so fielders must hold on these balls before charging to make sure they aren't going over their head.



Keep Practice “Real”

- ∅ Five Alive
- ∅ Tweeners
- ∅ Do or Die
- ∅ Two Line
Communication
- ∅ Cut ‘em Down
- ∅ Fence
- ∅ Harvey’s Wallbanger
- ∅ “Sports Center”



Game Like Practice

3.2

Five Alive

Age: **12 and older** Skill Level: **A, C, D**

Introduction

In playing this game, outfielders will develop the strategies and tactics needed to catch fly balls, play balls off the wall, and react to game situations. The game will also improve their conditioning. This game should be played as often as necessary, at least several times per week at practice. As outfielders learn to stretch their limits at practice, they increase their confidence and become more adept at recognizing balls that they can attempt to catch during games. As the season progresses, coaches should add additional challenges and variations as necessary.

Equipment

Six baseballs, four cones or other suitable markers

Setup

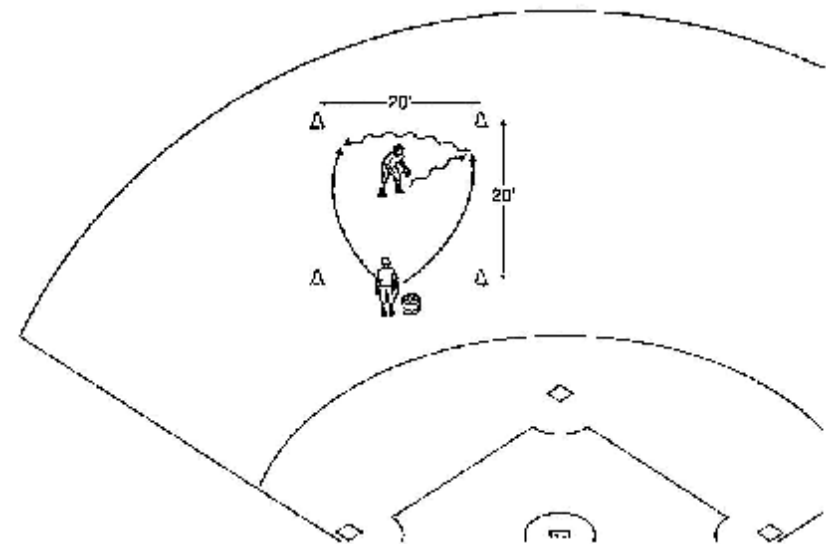
1. Place four cones (markers) in a square approximately 20 feet (6 m) on a side.
2. Player A (fielder) assumes position in the middle of the square with his glove on.
3. Player B (thrower) assumes position outside the box formed by the cones and facing player A.

Procedure

Outfielders partner up and work in the outfield. Place four markers around player A, creating a square 20 feet (6 m) on a side (see figure). Player B, the thrower, tries to get the ball past the outfielder using a looping throw to simulate a fly ball. Each outfielder receives six balls per round. When player A is about to catch the first ball, player B, the thrower, releases the second ball so that it will land, if uncaught, anywhere within the 20-foot square. He does the same with the next three balls. The thrower must throw underhand with an arm, much like a slow pitch softball pitch. After throwing the fifth ball, the thrower rolls a ground ball into the zone, which the fielder must stop from going through. The players then switch positions. Players perform as many sets as the coach deems necessary. The thrower receives two points for each ball that hits the ground and one point for a ground ball that gets past the outfielder. The fielder receives one point for each caught ball and two points for stopping the ground ball.

Coaching Point

- Because this game will rapidly fatigue players, make certain to allow enough rest time after each rotation.



Learning Priorities

3.10

Tweeners

Age: **12 and older** Skill level: **1, 2, 3, 4**

Introduction

This game is similar to Two-Line Communication except that it employs the whole team. Infielders work on coming in on popups and communicating with outfielders and other outfielders. The game also helps validate the priority calling system.

Equipment

Flicking machine or fungo hitter, baseballs

Setup

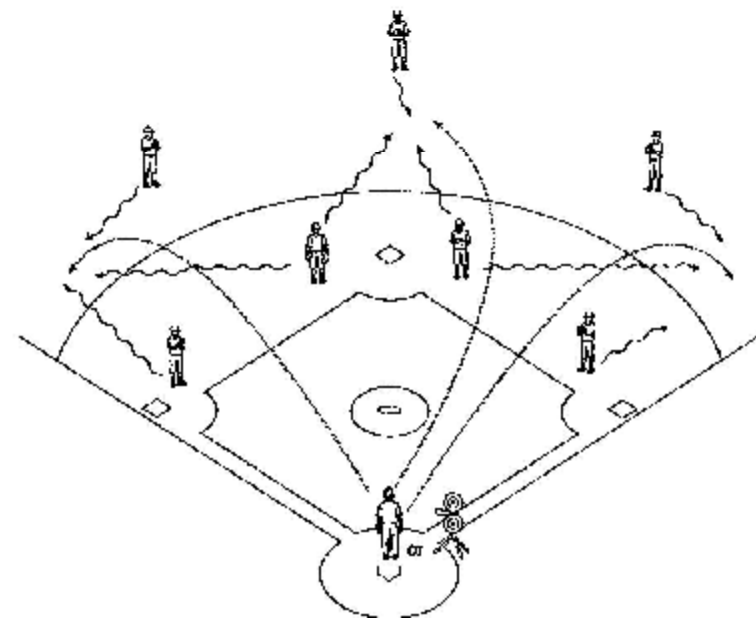
- Fielders assume their positions on the field.
- A fungo hitter, coach, or pitching machine is stationed at home plate.
- A player with a bat stands to either side of the machine.

Procedure

Players assume their ready positions. Play begins when the coach hits a popup or uses a machine to loft a popup between the outfield and the infield. Balls should be hit or lofted in a way that forces outfielders to charge hard and make decisions. If a machine is used, then at the same time a ball is placed in the machine, a batter standing nearby should take a swing to simulate a live event. When the ball is hit and an outfielder calls for it, the infielder should immediately move away from the area in a direction away from the flight of the ball. By varying the speed, direction, and angle of the pitching machine, coaches can give players practice in communicating about the many types of popups that occur in games. For example, aiming the machine to hit a high popup just in or out of the outfield behind first base engages three fielders—the first baseman, second baseman, and right fielder—who must try to get into position to make the catch. Runners can be placed on the bases to simulate game situations. Scoring for this game should be done on a team basis; points can be awarded for current play or deducted for indecision.

Coaching Points

- Teach infielders simply to wave their hands above their heads to "call" for the ball.
- Teach shortstops and second basemen to be aggressive in going after popups near the foul lines behind third base and first base respectively.
- Make certain that catchers and pitchers move into appropriate backup positions on each play.



Keep it Real

3.5

Do or Die

Age: 12 and older | Skills: Accuracy, Timing

Introduction

A skill that all outfielders need to master, especially at upper levels, is the do-or-die play—being able to field the ball on the run and make a quick throw to a base. This type of play has inherent risks because outfield turf does not always allow true bounces off the ball, but outfielders still need to watch on the play to be able to cut down runners who are trying to advance. This game gives batters practice in the situation necessary for the play, yet it does not call for long throws or unrealistic play situations. The game also calls for accuracy.

Equipment

Ball, accuracy target on a stand, and some netting or backstop fencing.

Setup

1. Have outfielders line up in a grassy area of the outfield about 100 feet (30 m) from and facing an outfield fence or similar standing.
2. A target (ball or coach stands near the fence with a bucket of balls (A pitching machine could substitute for a cage batter).
3. Place an accuracy target (can using a catch or relay person) near an outfield fence. If an accuracy target is unavailable, a similar target could be taped to the fence.

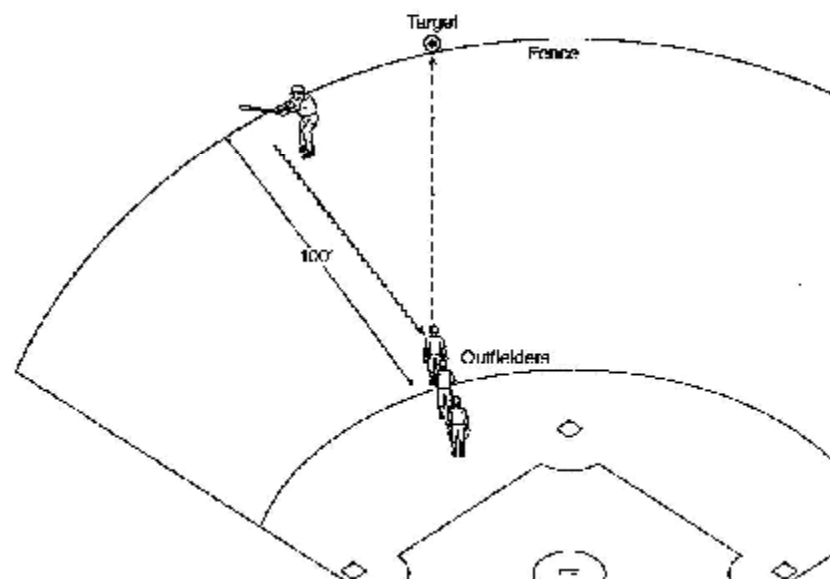
Procedure

The coach or fungo batter tosses a ball to the first outfielder in line. The outfielder should take the proper approach to the ball, field it, transfer it to his throwing hand, and make a throw toward the target. After the first player has fielded the ball and thrown, he returns to the end of the line, the next player assumes a ready position, and the coach hits another ground ball. Points can be given to fielders for reaching base by hitting the target or for hitting a particular part of the target. For example, hitting the top left quadrant of the target might be worth five points, hitting anywhere else on the top half of the target could be worth three points, a near miss could be worth two points, and so on. Coaches could even put the outline of a cutoff player on the target to stimulate reality more closely. The important thing is that the target should be about as the height of a player standing in cutoff position. Using a target instead of a player gives players immediate visual feedback and allows infielders to work on fielding hits on another part of the field. Also, by using the distance, outfielders do not have to throw as far and will not fatigue their arms.

If coaches want fielders to throw longer distances, they could set the target at a point where the throws from the outfielders would take one bounce before hitting the target. The height of the target should be adjusted accordingly.

Coaching Point

- This game provides an excellent opportunity for coaches to emphasize good crow-hop technique. Watch to make sure that players field the ball outside their glove-side leg and time the scoop of the ball to coincide with the landing of the glove-side foot.



OF Games

3.1

Two-Line Communication

Age: **All** Skill Level: **All**

Introduction

A coach hits a long fly ball into the gap between two outfielders. Both fielders sprint to the ball, each intent on making the catch and oblivious to the other's racing advance. Few moments in baseball are more frightening than watching two players speed toward each other about to engage in a head-on collision. The chance for injury in this scenario is obviously great. Most of these sorts of disasters can be avoided if players practice communicating often. This game provides practice in both the proper technique for fielding balls in the gaps and communication between outfielders.

Equipment

Pitching machine, fungo hitter, baseballs

Setup

1. Outfielders form two groups—one in center field and one in left or right field.
2. A fungo hitter, coach, or pitching machine is stationed near second base.
3. A shaggy for return throws stands near the fungo hitter, coach, or pitching machine.

Procedure

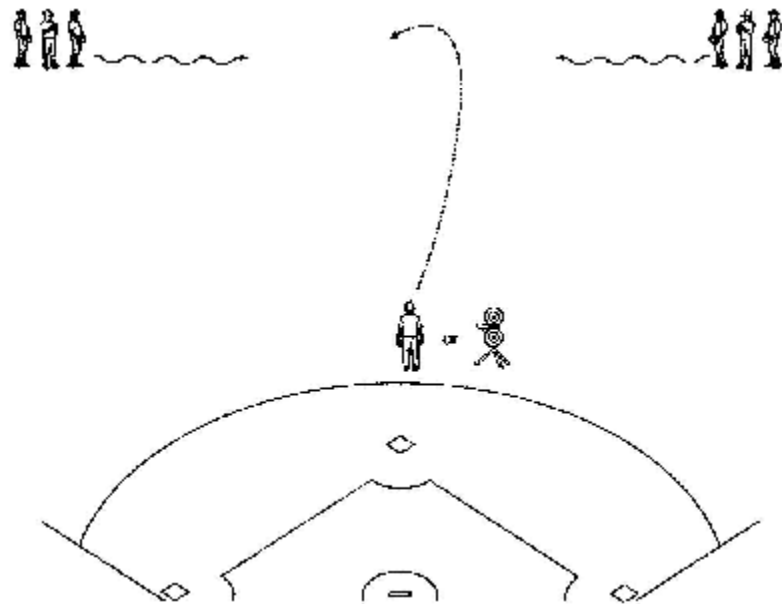
The two groups of fielders should be about 100 feet (30 m) apart. Play begins when the coach hits a fly ball somewhere between the two lines of fielders. One fielder from each line moves toward the ball to field it. When one of the fielders calls for the ball, the other fielder should immediately move into position to back up the play. Fielders should loudly call, "Mine, mine, mine" when they have made the decision to field the ball. The fielder who has not made the call for the catch should respond by saying, "Yours, yours, yours." After the catch the outfielders switch lines. The coach then hits another fungo into the same area. Play continues until the coach feels that the outfielders have had sufficient practice in the skill. Scoring, if done, should be done on a team basis with emphasis on good communication.

A pitching machine can be used instead of a fungo, especially when the coach wants to replicate the same sort of fly ball each time.

Ground balls should be mixed in with the fly balls to give additional practice in backing up. With younger players, reduce the distance between the fielding lines and toss the ball in the air by hand until they have learned how to call for a ball and back up. This method lessens the chance of injury.

Coaching Points

1. Make certain that players are extremely vocal when calling for the ball. They have to shout!
2. Make sure that backup outfielders respond loudly to eliminate the chance for confusion.
3. Emphasize a priority system.
4. Watch that players do not call for the ball too early. The ball should reach its highest point or be starting downward before a player makes a call.
5. Coach the backup outfielder to back up low, especially on balls that are not called for until very late and on balls where a collision is possible.



OF Games

3.6

Cut 'Em Down

Age: 12 and older Skill: Strength, Coordination

Introduction

For players, base and are more exciting than watching an outfielder cut down a lead runner at third base or home plate. This game gives fielders an opportunity to work on their long throws in real time, gamelike situations. It also allows base runners to work on their base-running skills and infielders a chance to make quality relays.

Equipment

Fungo miter, bucket of baseballs

Setup

1. Outfielders take positions in left, center, and right fields.
2. A fielder is at third base, a catcher is at home plate, and a shortstop is in cutoff position.
3. A fungo hitter, coach, or pitching machine is stationed on the infield grass.
4. A line of runners wearing helmets is at first base or second base.
5. A coach is in the third-base coaching box.

Procedure

Fielders assume their ready positions. The first runner in line at first base takes a 12-foot (3.7 m) lead. Play begins when the coach signals the runner to take a secondary lead at the base and then hits a ground ball to one of the outfielders. The runner breaks on the sound of the ball hitting the bat and attempts to go to third on the play, depending on where the ball is hit. If the ball is hit to home, left field or second base, the runner must judge whether he should advance. If the ball is hit behind him, the runner must pick up the signal to advance from the third-base coach.

The outfielders must come up knowing to third base to try to cut down the runner. The shortstop must get into good cutoff position and execute good technique. Runners are not allowed to slide into the base. If the ball beats the runner to the base, he is out. Award two points for every outfield throw that beats a runner and one point for every runner who beats the throw. Coaches can vary the scoring to promote aggressiveness on the bases.

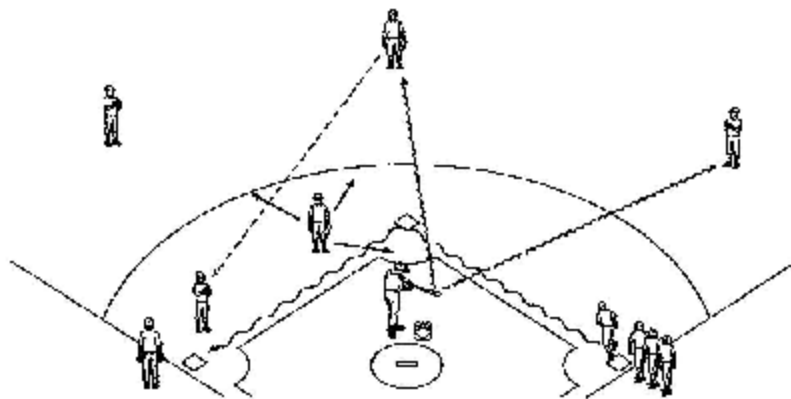
The fungo hitter should hit the ground balls at various speeds, hitting somewhat to left field to challenge the runner, balls that will be hit to left and right of the cutoff to create as many variables as possible.

A variation of the game is to start the runner at second base and have the outfielders throw home.

Both games provide opportunities for coaches to evaluate their judgments about when to send a runner and when to hold him.

Coaching Points

1. Encourage players to make their own baserunning decisions when the ball is hit in front of them.
2. Have players consider the arm strength of the outfielder, which arm the outfielder throws with, how hard the ball was hit, the direction of the ball, and the field conditions.
3. Direct players to make their decision to go or not go when their foot hits second base.



Playing the Fences

3.8

Fence

Age: **12 and older** Skills: **Basic** Level: **1**

Introduction

Ken Griffey Jr., one of the finest outfielders of all time, has made a career out of game-saving, leaping grabs at the outfield wall—often with little regard for his personal safety. Making this sort of play is every outfielder's fantasy. But the reality is that the play is difficult to make unless practiced. At least once or twice during the course of a season, outfielders should practice making catches at the fence or jumping at the fence in an attempt to scoop a home run.

Equipment

Baseballs, outfield fence, cones, pitching machine (optional)

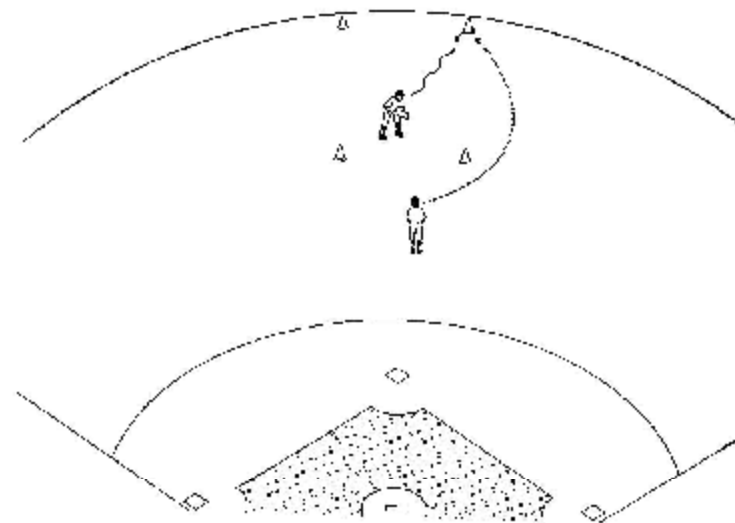
Setup

1. Outfielders pair up near the fence. One outfielder will be a feeder, the other a fielder.
2. Place cones to mark a 40-foot square area near the fence.
3. (Optional) Set up pitching machine at edge of infield aimed toward the outfield fence.

Procedure

One outfielder acting as fielder, assumes a ready position facing the infield and at the forward part of the area marked by the cones. The other outfielder, the feeder, faces the fielder. The feeder throws high-leaping fly balls toward the fence. As soon as a ball is thrown, the fielder should execute a drop step and attempt to field the fly ball. Feeder's should throw the balls in an arc so that they either hit off the top of the fence or land very near the fence. After five or six throws, outfielders should change positions. As an option, a pitching machine can be set to throw high-leaping fly balls close to the fence. A coach should be used as a feeder for the machine as a safety precaution. When the coach drops a ball into the machine, the outfielder should read the arc of the ball and sprint to the fence in an attempt to catch it. With skill and minute adjustments to the speed of the machine, the ball's can just barely clear the fence, giving outfielders practice in making leaping catches. Not all balls need be thrown against the fence.

Caution: Make sure that the outfield fence is protected with covering.



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Playing the Fences

3.3

Harvey's Wallbanger

Age: 12 and older Skill Level: 1, 2, 3+

Introduction

During the early 1980s the Milwaukee Brewers had a potent lineup of home-run hitters under manager Harvey Kuhn. As a result, the team earned the nickname Harvey's Wallbangers as a play on words about a popular refreshment at the time. Not only balls go crashing off or over walls, outfielders also make their share of contact with solid objects. Young players seldom receive enough opportunities to learn how to make catches near a wall or to play balls on the rebound off a fence. This game gives outfielders a chance to do both. Players learn how to sense their relationship to the fence or wall without taking their eyes off the ball and how to read and react to errors off the fence.

Equipment

Six baseballs, four cones or other suitable markers

Setup

- 1 Using a fence or wall as the back marker for the area, place four cones in a square approximately 40 feet (12 m) on a side.
- 2 Divide outfielders into groups of three.
- 3 Player A (fielder) assumes a ready position near the front of the square facing the infield.
- 4 Player B (feeder) stands about 15 feet (5 m) in front of the area, facing player A.
- 5 Player C (cutoff) stands about 100 feet (30 m) from the wall in a line with one of the bases.

Procedure

Outfielders work in groups of three within a 40-foot (12 m) square, created by placing four markers around player A. Player B, the feeder, throws fly balls to the wall within the area bounded by the cones. Player A must read the arc of the ball and run to the wall to attempt the catch. After making the catch, player A throws to the cutoff person, player C, and then returns to the front of the square to await another ball. After five fly balls, players rotate. Player B becomes the feeder, player C becomes the fielder, and player A becomes the cutoff. Players may throw balls underhand or overhand toward the wall as long as they remain within the marked area.

The outfielder receiving the ball should keep his eyes on the ball as he retreats to make the catch. On balls close to the wall, he should sense that he is approaching the wall by feeling the waiting track and by using his throwing hand to find the wall. The

feeder may throw line drives over the fielder's head that bounce off the wall. When this happens, the fielder should pull up, play the ball off the wall, and then make a strong throw through to the cutoff person. At least one ball in each round should imitate a line drive off the wall.

The outfielder receives one point for each fly ball caught and another point for each accurate throw. If the cutoff must move considerably, no points are awarded. Deduct a point if a ball caroms off the wall and gets past the fielder. Coaches may decide to award more points for difficult catches, such as leaping or climbing catches over the wall. If the feeder throws the ball out of the park, deduct points from the feeder's total.

Coaching Point

- 1 Make sure that players watch the ball and not the fence. Outfielders fail to catch many catchable balls near a wall because they peek at the wall and lose sight of the ball.

