These are just a few examples of the signals we use to relay information to defensive players.
Photos courtesy of Cal-State Fullerton.

- No doubles
- Hit cutoff man
- Throw directly to second base on a base hit (for outfielders)
- Nothing over your head
- Nothing between you and the line
- Shade the line
- First baseman plays behind the runner
- No-throw sign to any infielder and catcher
- Infielders must go the long way on ground ball on a full count
- Back-side runner on double steal
- Cat and mouse with corner infielders or base-hit bunt coverages
- Infield depths
- Speed of hitter
- Type of base-stealing threat
- Coverages for stealing between middle infielders
- Stall for time
- Pitch the hitter fine
- First-and-third defenses (identifying the fastest runner on base)
- Bunt defenses

As you can see, we have the ability to communicate a vast amount of important information to the defensive players. As I indicated earlier in this chapter, to be effective it is crucial to use this system properly. The information must be relayed at the proper time. The players must be trained to make eye contact at the proper time. They must have time to interact with their teammates and still be able to commit mentally to their individual responsibilities.

Although teams have played successfully with many different systems, not much has changed over the years. Some have fiddled around with exaggerated defensive alignments for certain situations or hitters, but most of us go back to an alignment that is virtually identical to the one used in the days when players left their gloves on the field. The more the game progresses with modern technology, the more it stays the same. The most athletic and best defensive players are likely to end up in the middle of the field. The players who are defensive liabilities are going to end up on the corners of the outfield. The slow, heavy kid with a good arm will end up behind the

plate. If a player can hit, the coach will find a way to get him in the lineup, even if the designated hitter position is already taken. Abner Doubleday must have known what he was doing.

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14

Defensive Tactics

Bob Morgan

Baseball games are lost, not won. A breakdown in team defense gives the opposition a chance to score. Good defense allows the offense only what they earn and nothing more.

The defense must be heads up and alert. Every player must be in the ballgame at all times. Every defensive player has a role on every play. Defense is the key to a sound and solid baseball team. The team that makes the fewest number of errors or mistakes in fielding and throwing will usually be the team that wins the game. Defensively, the focus should be on making the average or routine play. The reasons for failure in defense are that players hurry their throws, throw off balance, are out of position, or do not know what to do. Coaches need to teach players to be under control to make the routine play. Defensive teams that can consistently make the average play will be efficient and thus have a good opportunity to win games.

First-and-Third Defense

The most important aspect of a first-and-third defense is understanding the game situation. The number of outs, the score, the speed of the runners, and the arm strength of the players involved are the elements that the coach should evaluate before the pitch. If the defense executes properly, the offense will seldom score. After getting the defensive sign from the coach, the catcher puts on the specific first-and-third defense.

The shortstop is usually assigned to cover second base because he normally has the best arm. The second baseman covers second base in certain situations if his arm is strong enough to make the play.

Second Baseman As Cutoff Man

In the first-and-third defense illustrated in figure 14.1, the shortstop covers the bag and the second baseman becomes the cutoff man (10 feet in front of the base). When the runner from first breaks, the catcher checks third base to see if the third baseman has his hands up. If the third baseman sees the runner off the base too far, he should raise both hands over his head as he breaks to the base to signal the catcher to throw the ball to third. The third baseman uses this signal because the catcher cannot accurately judge the runner's distance from third base. If the third baseman's hands aren't up, the catcher should throw through to second base.

The second baseman must read the runner at third base. If the runner breaks, he should cut the ball and throw home; if the runner hasn't broken for home by the time the ball is in the cutoff position, the second baseman should fake a cut by slamming his fist into his glove to freeze the runner at third base. The shortstop covers second base and prepares to tag the runner if the ball goes through to the base. If the runner at third base breaks late, the shortstop can relay the ball home.

The pitcher fakes a cut on the catcher's throw to second base in an attempt to confuse the runner at third base. After a fake cut the pitcher breaks to back up home plate via the first-base line. The left fielder backs up a possible throw to third base from the catcher, the center fielder backs up the possible throw to second base from the catcher, and the right fielder backs up a possible rundown between first and second. The first baseman trails the runner to second base.
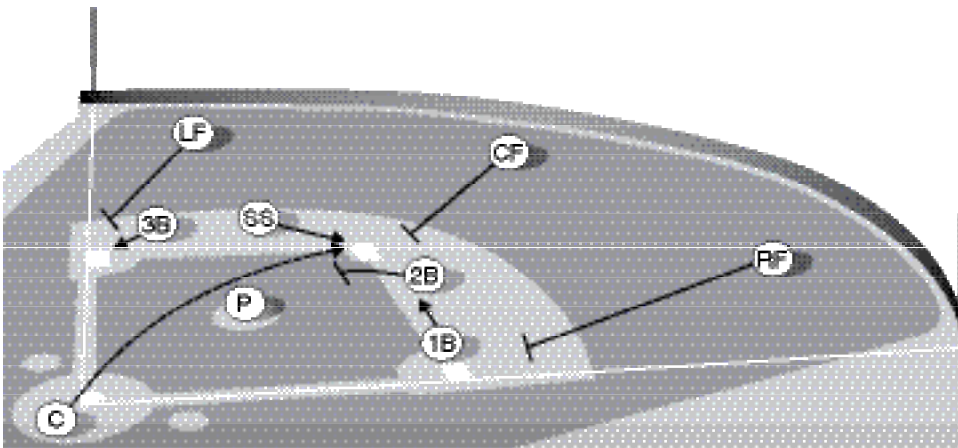

FIGURE 14.1   First-and-third defense: second baseman as cutoff man.

Throw Through to Second Base

In this defense the catcher again tries to freeze the runner at third base by checking the third baseman to see if his hands are up. If they are up, he throws to third; if not, he throws to the shortstop covering second base, who is one step in front of the bag squared to home plate (figure 14.2). The second baseman backs up second base. If the runner on third breaks for the plate, the shortstop charges hard, straight toward the plate, to cut the ball off. After chopping his feet for a couple of steps to get on balance, he catches the ball and throws to the catcher. If the runner on third doesn't break for the plate, the shortstop stays at the bag and tags the runner out coming from first base. If the runner on first base has the base stolen, the shortstop should charge in and cut the ball off to avoid a collision with the sliding runner.

The pitcher fakes a cut on the catcher's throw to second base to confuse the runner at third base. After a fake cut, the pitcher breaks to back up home plate via the first-base line. The left fielder backs up a possible throw to third base from the catcher, the center fielder backs up the possible throw to second base from the catcher, and the right fielder backs up a possible rundown between first and second. The first baseman trails the runner to second base.

Straight to Shortstop

This defense is designed to keep the runner on third base from scoring after the ball passes the batter. The shortstop takes two hard steps toward second
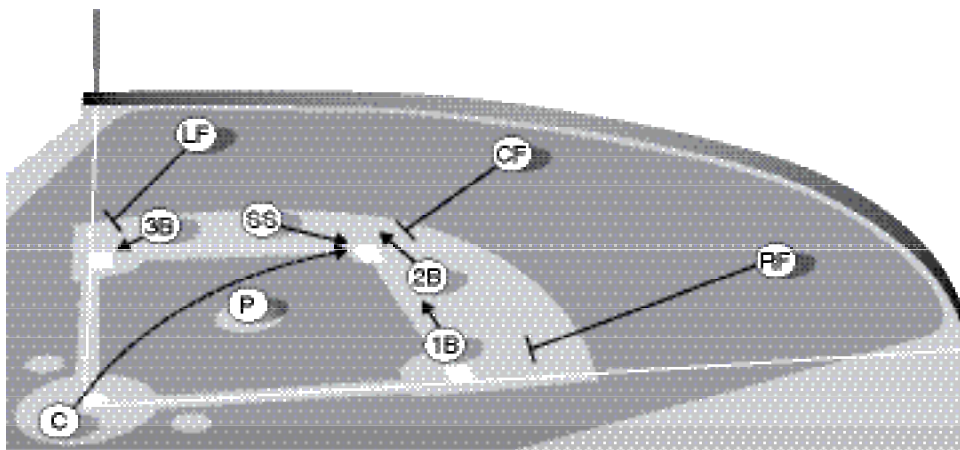

FIGURE 14.2 First-and-third defense: throw through to second base.

base then comes straight up toward home plate (figure 14.3). The catcher throws straight to the shortstop without looking the runner back at third base. The second baseman covers second base after the ball passes the batter, while the first baseman trails the runner from first base to a position midway between first base and second base. The third baseman covers third base and lets the shortstop and catcher know when the runner breaks for home plate. He does this by yelling "Four, four!"

The shortstop throws the ball back to home plate after he catches it, or he may possibly back door the runner at third base. The pitcher should back up home via the first-base line after he pitches to the plate. The left fielder backs up third base for a possible throw from the catcher, the center fielder backs up the shortstop from a throw from the catcher, and the right fielder backs up a possible rundown between second base and third base. The defense concedes second base to the offensive team.
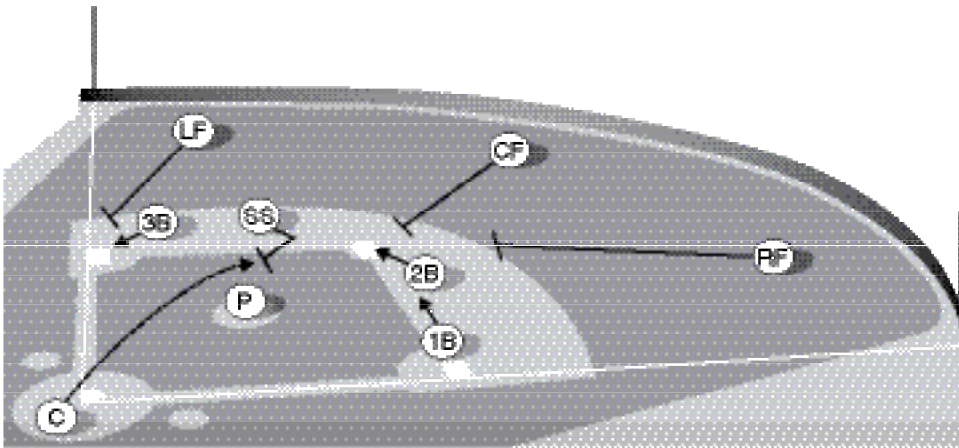

FIGURE 14.3   First-and-third defense: straight to shortstop.

Throw to Pitcher

The shortstop covers second base, and the second baseman goes to a cutoff position 10 feet in front of second base, as shown in figure 14.4. Without glancing at the runner at third base, the catcher throws the ball high over the pitcher as if he were throwing to second base. The pitcher cuts the ball off and checks the runner at third base. If he has no play at third base, he looks at second base. If the runner is caught between first and second, he gives the ball up to the shortstop covering second base or the second

baseman, who is 15 feet up the base line depending on the runner's position. The shortstop or second baseman yells "Ball," indicating to the pitcher who should receive the ball. The other infielder drops to a knee and points to his teammate. Once the infielder checks the runner at third base, he shuffles (not sprints) the runner back to first base. He listens for a call from the third baseman should the runner from third base break for the plate. The pitcher covers first base once he gives up the ball, the left fielder backs up third base in foul territory, the center fielder backs up second base, and the right fielder backs up the second baseman's position.
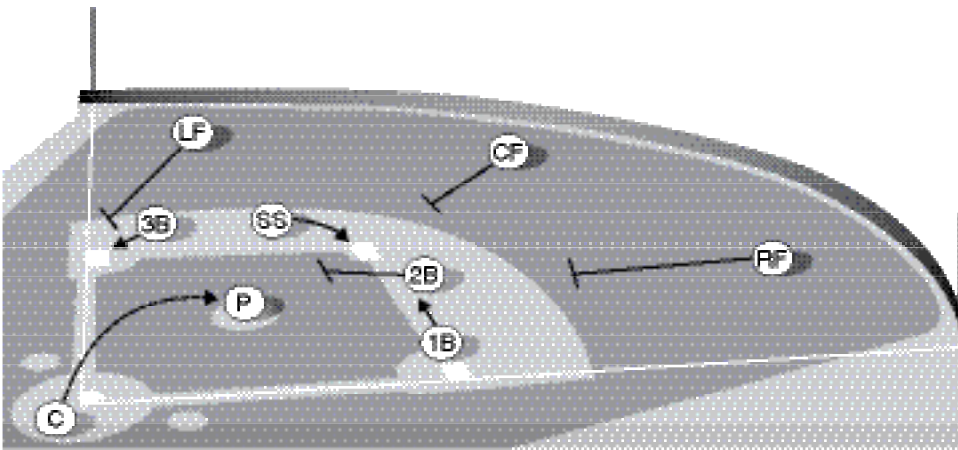

FIGURE 14.4   First-and-third defense: throw to pitcher.

Ball Fake and Throw to Third

In preventing the runner at third base from scoring, this defense concedes second base to the runner. After the pitch passes the hitter, the third baseman covers third base, the shortstop backs up third base, the second baseman covers second base, and the first baseman trails the runner to second base (figure 14.5). The catcher comes out and gives a good arm fake to second base, making sure he clears and goes beyond home plate, and then throws directly to third base. The pitcher backs up home via the first-base line after he pitches to the plate. The left fielder backs up the catcher's throw to third base, the center fielder backs up a possible throw from the catcher to second base, and the right fielder backs up a possible throw to second base from third base.
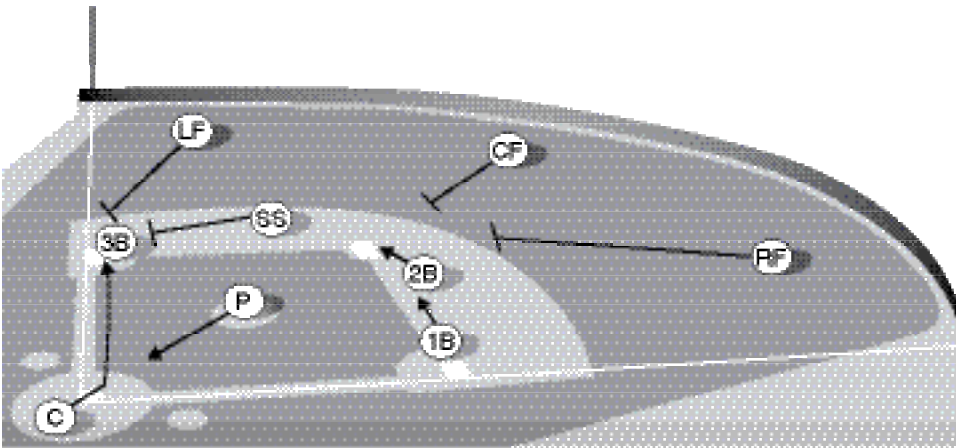
FIGURE 14.5   First-and-third defense: ball fake and throw to third.

Forced Balk Defense

The forced balk defense is the only first-and-third defense not put on by the catcher. The defense is a reaction to the offensive team's sending the runner from first base to second base before the pitch to the plate. The pitcher steps off the rubber and freezes the runner at third base by turning directly to third and checking the runner at the bag. If the runner is too far off, he throws to the third baseman. If he isn't far enough off, the pitcher throws the ball to the second baseman, who comes straight up to the inside of the base line approximately 15 feet from second base. The pitcher then goes to back up home by way of the third-base line. The third baseman covers third base and alerts the infielders if the runner breaks to home by yelling "Four, four!" The shortstop covers second base, the second baseman comes straight up into the base line to receive the throw from the pitcher, and the first baseman trails the runner to second base (figure 14.6).

When the second baseman receives the throw from the pitcher, he checks the runner at third base and begins to shuffle the base runner back to first base. If the base runner at third breaks to the plate, the third baseman yells "Four, four!" and the second baseman turns and throws to the catcher. The first baseman should call for the ball when he knows he can catch the ball and tag the runner out. He is then ready to throw home should the runner at third base break for the plate. The first baseman should avoid running with the ball toward second base.

If the pitcher is late stepping off the mound, the second baseman goes to a knee and points to second base. This signals the pitcher to throw the ball to the shortstop, who is covering second base. The left fielder backs up third base for a possible rundown, the center fielder backs up second base for a
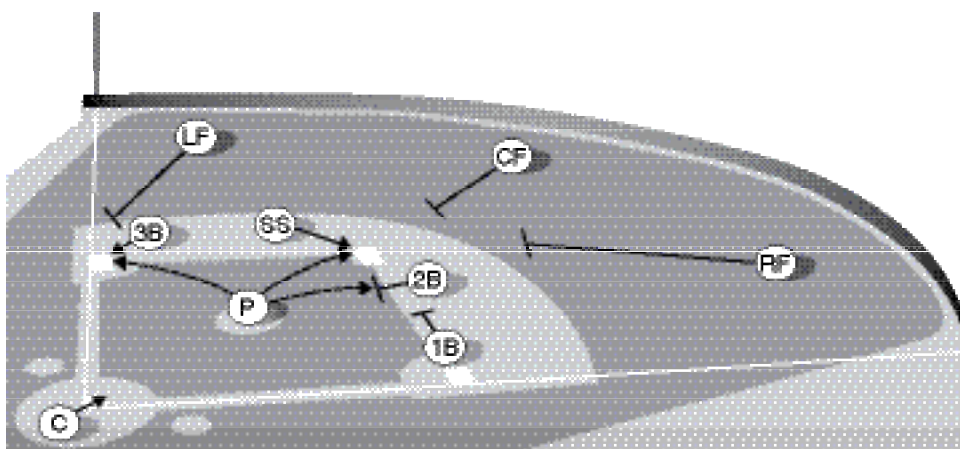
FIGURE 14.6 First-and-third defense: forced balk.

possible rundown between second and third, and the right fielder backs up the throw to second base from the pitcher.

Cutoff and Relay System

The purpose of your cutoff and relay system is to keep runners from taking an extra base if no play occurs at home or third. Relays and cutoffs are team plays that require a great deal of practice and teamwork to be executed properly. Too often, missed cutoffs and relay plays have given opponents the extra base that led to a run that decided the game. The throw from the outfielder must be low enough for the cutoff man to handle. If the throw is too high, the runner can react immediately and advance a base. We teach our outfielders to hit the cutoff man in the head. Many factors on a batted ball will help the outfielder determine where to throw the ball including

- the speed of the runner,
- the game situation,
- the outfielder's arm strength,
- how hard the ball is hit, and
- the distance the outfielder must move left or right to field the ball.

The outfielder can evaluate many of those factors before the pitch, which will limit the amount of information he needs to process after the ball is hit.

We want our relay or cutoff man to catch the ball on the fly, so if necessary he should move in or out to do so. Also, we want him to catch the ball

on the throwing side and to catch it from the heel to the palm of the glove. To catch the ball on his throwing side, he steps forward with his right foot in the direction of the throw. Holding his hands letter high, he provides a good target.

The shortstop acts as the cutoff man on all throws to third base. On throws to home plate, the third baseman will line up home on all throws to the right of the shortstop. The first baseman will line up home on all balls to the left of the shortstop. The reason for using different cutoff men at home plate is the distance the first or third baseman would have to run to get in cutoff position. If the third baseman is playing deep and dives on the ground for a ball in left field, the first baseman should read this and handle the cutoff to home because the third baseman is out of position. The third baseman and shortstop would just crisscross; the third baseman would cover second and the shortstop would cover third. The same would hold true if the ball were hit into right field and the first baseman dove for a ball. If this happens, the first and third basemen would crisscross. The first baseman would go to cover second, and the second baseman would cover first. The third baseman would become the cutoff man to home.

The cutoff man's alignment will depend on the strength of the outfielder's arm, so the alignment will vary. The closer the cutoff man can be to the bag (40 feet), the harder it is for the runner to recognize whether to attempt to advance to the next base. The runner must delay his decision until the ball passes the cutoff man, which is an advantage for the defense. Also, from a spot closer to the base the cutoff man can more easily cut off poor throws, and he has more range in handling high throws. We want good, hard throws through the cutoff man's eyes.

To let a ball go through to the base, the receiver should yell "Go, go!" He should yell it loudly and in time to let the cutoff man react. If the receiver yells "Go!" the cutoff man should pop his mitt and fake a cut to keep the trailing runner from advancing. For the receiver to indicate that he wants the ball cut off, he should call out the number of the base where the ball should go. If there is no play at any of the bases, he would yell "Cut!" meaning for the cutoff man to catch and hold the ball. After catching the ball, the cutoff man should look for a possible play at any of the bases. If the throw is off alignment or dying and a play at the lead base is possible, the receiver should yell "Relay!" at which point the cutoff man would catch the ball and throw to the lead base. Also, the cutoff man can automatically cut the ball if he reads a ball that is dying or off alignment.

Tables 14.1 through 14.8 describe specific game situations and illustrate the most effective defensive strategies for each circumstance. Again, these relays and cutoffs require a lot of practice and exceptional teamwork to be successful. Strong, confident communication is necessary. Players must make decisions based on the likelihood of tagging the runner out and not allowing other runners to advance to better scoring positions.

TABLE 14.1 Single With No Runners On

BALL HIT TO LEFT

P	Moves toward 1B
C	Trails runner to 1B
1B	Backs up 2B, yells if runner goes to 2B
2B	Covers 2B
3B	Moves toward mound for deflected ball
SS	Lines up throw to 2B and throws
LF	Fields grounder to 2B
CF	Backs up left fielder
RF	Moves to backup 2B in line with throw
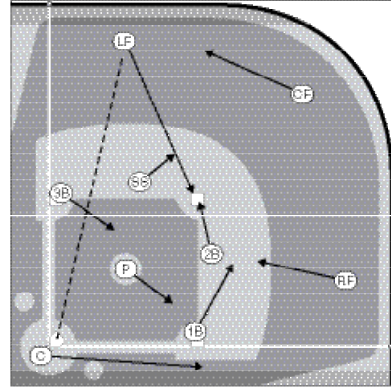
BALL HIT TO CENTER

P	Backs up 2B
C	Trails runner to 1B
1B	Makes sure runner touches base and then covers 1B
2B	Covers 2B
3B	Backs up 2B for deflected throw
SS	Lines up throw to 2B
LF	Backs up CF
CF	Fields grounder and throws to 2B
RF	Backs up CF and will cover 2B if ball is hit to CF's right
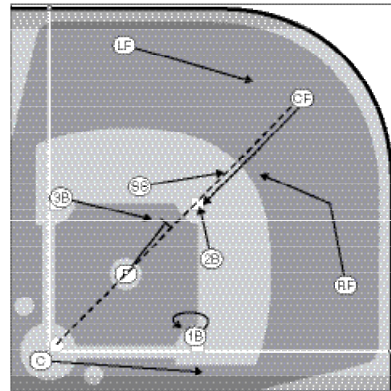
BALL HIT TO RIGHT

|	
P	Breaks for 1B, backs up catcher if outfielder throws behind runner
C	Follows runner to 1B
1B	Goes after ball and stays away from 1B so that runner rounds bag
2B	Short cuts position and lines up throw to 2B
3B	Backs up 2B
SS	Covers 2B
LF	Backs up throw to 2B
CF	Backs up RF
RF	Throws to 2B, looks for possible play at 1B
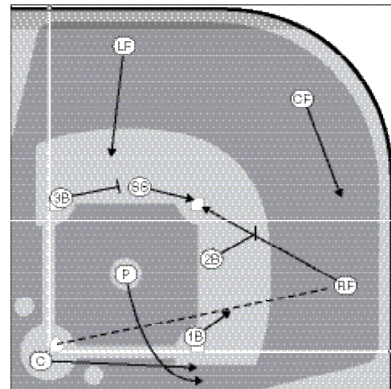
TABLE 14.2   Single With a Runner on First Base

BALL HIT TO LEFT

P	Backs up 3B
C	Backs up pitcher on play
1B	Makes sure runner touches 1B, backs up 2B
2B	Covers 2B
3B	Covers 3B
SS	Lines up throw to 3B
LF	Fields ball and throws to SS in cutoff position
CF	Backs up LF
RF	Goes toward 1B area
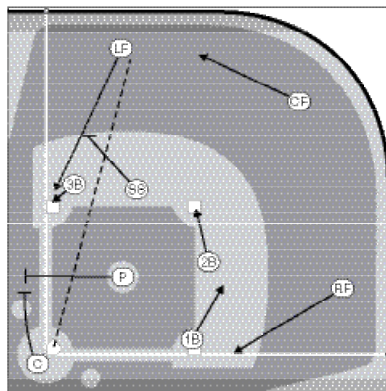
BALL HIT TO CENTER

P	Backs up 3B
C	Covers home
1B	Watches runner touch base, stays near bag
2B	Covers 2B
3B	Covers 3B
SS	Lines up throw to 3B
LF	Backs up CF
CF	Fields ball and throws to 3B
RF	Backs up CF
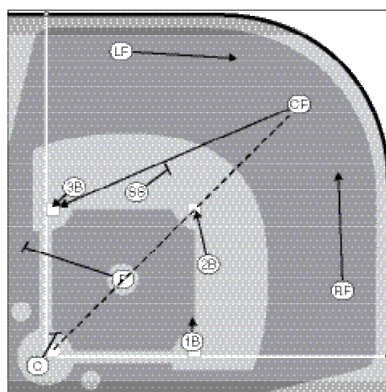
BALL HIT TO RIGHT

P	Backs up 3B
C	Backs up pitcher, covers home
1B	Watches runner tag 1B
2B	Covers 2B
3B	Covers 3B
SS	Cutoff man for throw to 3B
LF	Backs up 3B
CF	Backs up RF
RF	Fields ball and throws to 3B
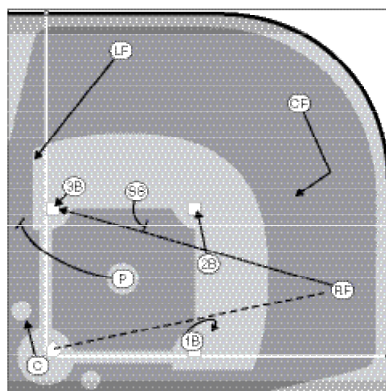
TABLE 14.3 Single With a Runner on Second Base

BALL HIT TO LEFT

P	Backs up home
C	Covers home
1B	Covers 1B, moves to cutoff position if to left of SS
2B	Covers 2B
3B	Lines up throw home
SS	Covers 3B
LF	Fields ball and throws home
CF	Backs up LF
RF	Moves to infield area
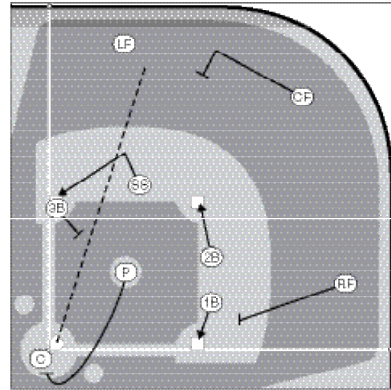
BALL HIT TO CENTER

P	Backs up home
C	Covers home
1B	Cutoff man behind the mound area
2B	Covers 1B
3B	Makes sure runner touches 3B, covers 3B
SS	Covers 2B
LF	Backs up 3B
CF	Fields ball and throws home
RF	Backs up CF
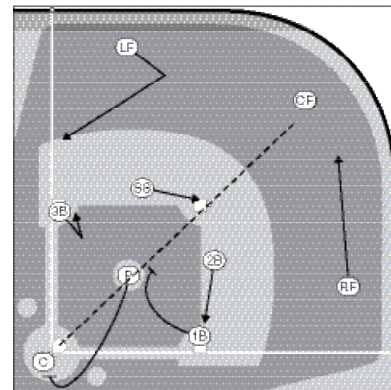
BALL HIT TO RIGHT

P	Backs up home
C	Covers home
1B	Cutoff man for throw home
2B	Covers 1B
3B	Covers 3B
SS	Covers 2B
LF	Backs up 2B area
CF	Backs up RF
RF	Throws to 1B in cutoff position
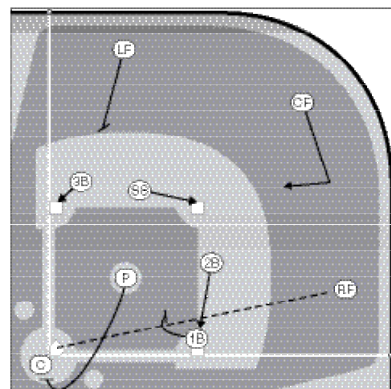
## TABLE 14.4   Single With Runners on First and Second Base

BALL HIT TO LEFT

P	Goes between third and home and reacts accordingly
C	Covers home
1B	Covers 1B and makes sure runner tags it
2B	Covers 2B
3B	Cutoff man near home
SS	Covers 3B
LF	Fields ball and throws home
CF	Backs up LF
RF	Moves in toward infield
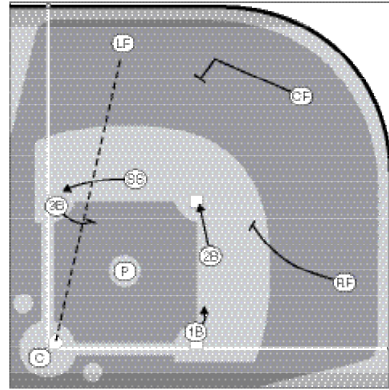
BALL HIT TO CENTER

P	Goes between third and home and reacts accordingly
C	Covers home
1B	Cutoff man for throw home
2B	Covers 2B
3B	Covers 3B
SS	Lines up throw to 3B
LF	Backs up CF
CF	Throws to cutoff man near home
RF	Backs up CF
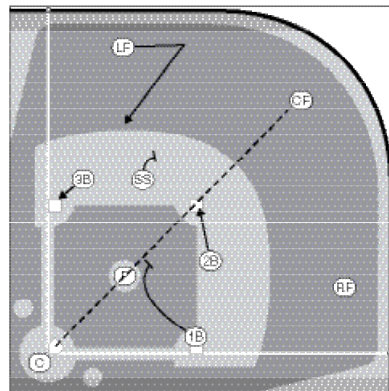
BALL HIT TO RIGHT

P	Goes between third and home and reacts accordingly
C	Covers home
1B	Cutoff man for throw home
2B	Covers 2B
3B	Covers 3B
SS	Lines up throw to 3B
LF	Moves in toward infield
CF	Backs up RF
RF	Throws to cutoff man near home
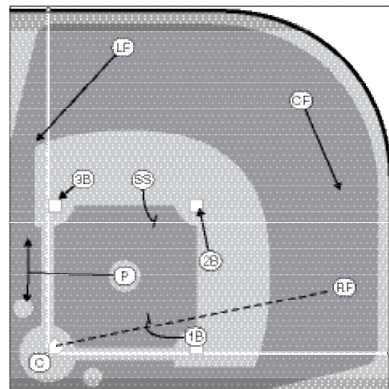
TABLE 14.5   Sure Double

BALL HIT TO LEFT

P	Backs up 3B
C	Covers home
1B	Watches runner touch base, trails him to 2B
2B	Covers 3B
3B	Backup man on tandem relay
SS	Front man on tandem relay
LF	Fields ball and throws to front man on tandem relay
CF	Backs up 2B
RF	Moves toward 1B area
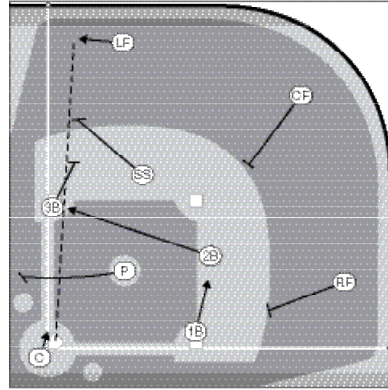
BALL HIT TO RIGHT CENTER

P	Backs up 3B
C	Covers home
1B	Watches runner touch base, trails him to 2B
2B	Front man on tandem relay
3B	Covers 3B
SS	Backup man on tandem relay
LF	Backs up 3B
CF	Goes for ball, hits front man on tandem relay
RF	Goes for ball, hits front man on tandem relay
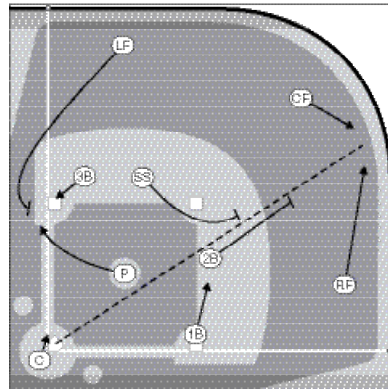
BALL HIT TO RIGHT

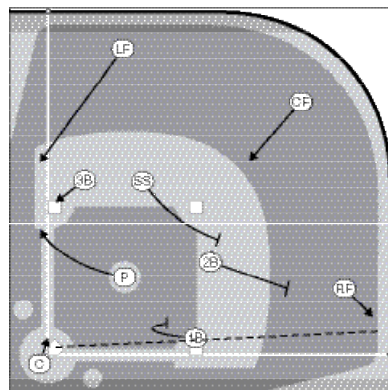|	
P	Backs up 3B
C	Covers home
1B	Cutoff man for throw home
2B	Front man on tandem relay
3B	Covers 3B
SS	Second man on tandem relay
LF	Backs up 3B area
CF	Moves to 2B area
RF	Goes for ball, hits front man on tandem relay

TABLE 14.6 Pop Foul, Runners on First and Third

POP-UP TO THIRD-BASE LINE

P	Covers 3B
C	Covers home
1B	Cutoff man for throw home
2B	Covers 2B
3B	Goes for ball
SS	Goes for ball
LF	Goes for ball
CF	Comes to 2B area
RF	Covers 1B
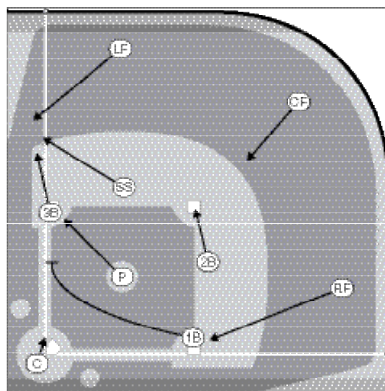
POP-UP STRAIGHT BACK

P	Covers home
C	Goes for ball
1B	Goes for ball
2B	Cutoff man for throw to 2B
3B	Goes for ball
SS	Covers 2B
LF	Goes to 3B area
CF	Backs up 2B
RF	Covers 1B area
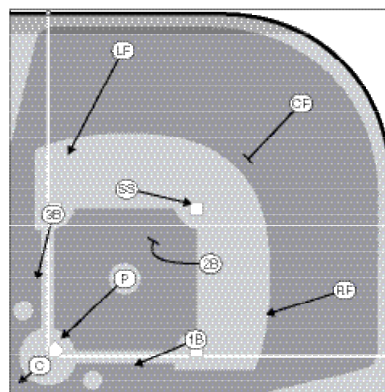
POP-UP TO FIRST-BASE LINE

P	Covers 1B
C	Covers home
1B	Goes for ball
2B	Goes for ball
3B	Cutoff man for throw home
SS	Covers 2B
LF	Covers 3B
CF	Comes to 2B area
RF	Goes for ball
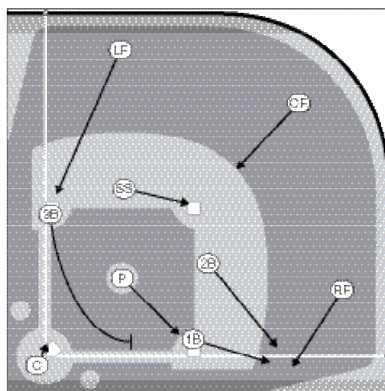
TABLE 14.7 Passed Ball or Wild Pitch With Bases Loaded

P	Covers home
C	Gets ball and throws to pitcher
1B	Goes to mound area to back up throw from pitcher
2B	Breaks in front of mound to back up throw from catcher
3B	Covers 3B
SS	Covers 2B
LF	Backs up 3B
CF	Backs up 2B
RF	Backs up 1B
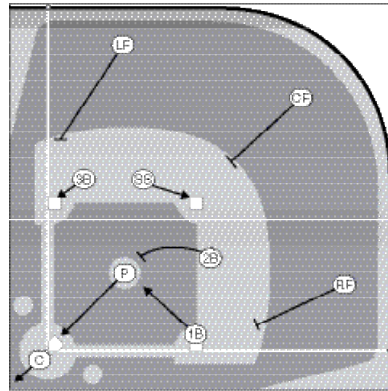
TABLE 14.8 Runner at Second Base, Ball Four or Strike Three, Ball Gets by Catcher

P	Covers home
C	Gets ball and throws home; if runner not coming throws to SS
1B	Covers 1B
2B	Cutoff position behind mound, reads runners
3B	Covers 3B
SS	Covers 2B
LF	Backs up 3B
CF	Backs up 2B
RF	Backs up 1B
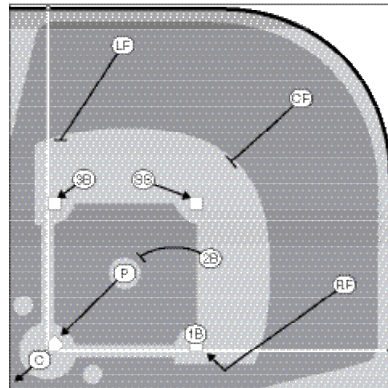
Rundowns

Rundowns are an integral part of the game of baseball, and thus the defensive team must practice them even though they occur less frequently than other defensive situations do. Handled properly by the defense, rundowns can be a pivotal point in the outcome of a ballgame. Rundowns may help your team out of a tough situation by foiling a rally by the opposition and should be an automatic out for the defense.

We observe some general rules in our rundown system. First, we want to make the runner commit himself and run at full speed in either direction. When a base runner is able to stop and change direction easily in a rundown, it is generally because he is able to stay under control while running and has not been forced to run full speed. When the defense forces a runner to run at full speed, he cannot easily stop and change direction. So the infielders can control a base runner running at full speed.

Another rule is to make at most one or two throws. With this method we would chase the runner in the direction he is going initially, usually forward. This technique requires the defense to make one throw. Trying to run him back to the base he last touched often requires an extra throw with additional chance for error. The one exception to this method is when we catch a runner between third base and home plate. If the runner goes beyond the halfway point in this situation, the third baseman will unload the ball to home plate, and we execute the rundown going back toward third base. That way, a mistake does not occur at the plate that allows the runner to score.

We have several general rules for the infielder with the ball. If the runner breaks hard and reaches the point of no return, the infielder unloads the ball. If the runner does not commit, then the infielder sprints the runner as hard as he can and anticipates a call for the ball. The infielder with the ball should run with the ball in the throwing position. If the runner is going away from his original base, the throw should be on the outside of the base line. When running a man back to his original base, the throw should be on the inside of the base line; the man catching the throw will be moved over, and the ball will be on his glove side. For left-handed throwers, the opposite is true, so an infielder receiving the throw moves over and lines up to receive the throw on the opposite side. The infielder without the ball should set up, go to the base if necessary, or close the gap. He should give the throwing infielder three keys about when to throw the ball:

1. He moves both his hands to a position head high.

2. He takes his first aggressive step forward off the base.

3. He yells "Ball."

He does all of this at the same time, which tells the throwing infielder to deliver him the ball head high. We want the throw from the head on up because this is an easy ball to handle when running.

In a typical rundown, you have a runner caught and you must get him with one throw. The infielders should get either outside or inside the base line. The fielder with the ball must go full speed at the runner to get him going full speed to the next base. The fielder with the ball will have his arm up in a throwing position as he runs, never faking the throw. When he does throw the ball on command from the receiving infielder, he throws the ball

not with a normal motion but as if he were throwing a dart. If he throws it with full arm motion, he will have difficulty controlling the flight of the ball.

The key to the timing of the play is the receiving infielder, who positions himself on or beside the base the runner is running toward. If the fielder with the ball is doing his job, he should have the runner running toward the receiving infielder at close to full speed. The receiving infielder will then give the three keys about when to throw the ball: (1) both hands head high, (2) an aggressive step in, and (3) a yell of "ball." If the timing is good, the runner has no chance to avoid a tag.

The infielder should make the tag with the ball in the glove and the free hand on the ball to prevent it from falling out of the glove on the tag itself. The infielder throwing the ball should always lean away from the path of the runner after throwing the ball. If he is over halfway down the base line when he delivers the ball, he continues to the forward base. If he is less than halfway, he turns back and covers the back base. Backup people are at the bases in case two throws are needed. They use the same fundamentals on the second throw. On any pickoff at first base, the pitcher backs up first base. On a pickoff at second base, the pitcher backs up third base. On a rundown between third and home, the pitcher has the plate until the first baseman relieves him. The pitcher then backs up the play at home plate. Players should always continue a rundown until the umpire signals "Out." They must not assume that a runner is out because he ran out of the baseline or they tagged him out.

Bunt Defense

The main goal of any bunt defense is to get an out. Each of your bunt defenses is designed to get an out at a certain base. If getting that out is not possible, you must get the batter out. Many big innings occur when a defensive team does not get an out in a sacrifice-bunt situation.

The key to running a good bunt defense is having the fielder make the correct decision about where to throw the ball. The bunted ball will dictate which base to throw the ball to. All bunt defenses should be put on by the catcher, who gets the play from the coach.

Bunt defenses start with the pitcher throwing a strike on the lower part of the plate, a pitch that is hard to bunt. A large percentage of pitches thrown up in the strike zone are called balls, so pitching high tends to lead to walks in bunting situations. In addition, a ball up is more vulnerable to be hit hard. That becomes a factor if the bunter pulls back to hit. A strike is important in this situation because if the bunter takes the pitch, the offense will see your defense. They may then change the direction of the bunt, execute a hit-and-run, fake bunt and slash, or do any number of things.

A missed bunt is a great opportunity to pick off a base runner. Many base runners tend to overextend their secondary leads in bunt situations. Catchers should look for those opportunities.

You can try several maneuvers to see if a team is bunting or not. You can have your pitcher go to a long count and step back, use the inside move at second base, or try a pickoff attempt because many hitters will give the play away with their hands.

To confuse the offense, all bunt defenses should look the same. You can and should use pickoffs at each base off your bunt defenses.

Tables 14.9 through 14.14 describe and illustrate the most effective bunt defenses in specific game situations.

TABLE 14.9   Normal Bunt Defense, Runner at First Base

P	Holds runner close at first base, throws a mid-low fastball for a strike, and has front and left-side responsibilities
1B	Holds runner on until pitcher delivers the pitch, then charges the plate
2B	Cheats up and over and covers first base
SS	Covers second base
3B	Starts 15 feet in on grass and charges the plate, has priority over everyone on bunted ball
C	Covers in front of plate, calls where to throw the ball, has priority over pitcher and first baseman
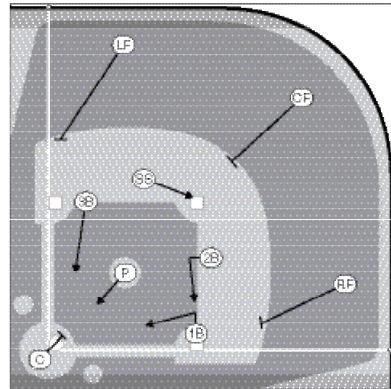
TABLE 14.10   Bunt Defense, Runner at First Base Breaks Early

|	
P	Throws mid-low strike, covers areas in front of the mound, covers third if third baseman fields bunt
1B	Breaks to home plate when pitcher reaches top of stretch
2B	Cheats up and over, covers first base
SS	Covers second
3B	Starts 10 feet in front of grass, charges when pitcher reaches top of stretch
C	Covers in front of plate, makes call to infielders, has priority over pitcher and first baseman, covers third if pitcher isn't there
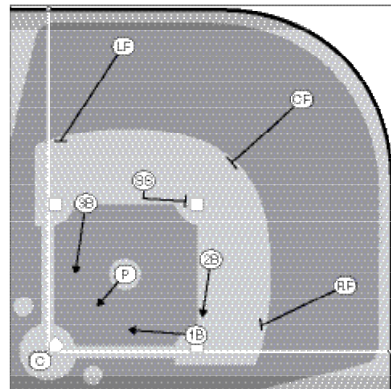
TABLE 14.11 Bunt Defense, Runner at First Base, Second Baseman Charges

P   Throws mid-low strike and breaks straight in, has coverage in front of mound, delivers to plate when sees second baseman out of corner of his eye

1B Holds runner on first

2B Starts on infield grass and breaks hard to plate when pitcher comes set, covers first-base side of mound

SS Covers second base

3B Starts 15 feet in front of grass and breaks hard when pitcher comes set, has third-base line

C   Short front, calls where to throw the ball

LF Backs up third

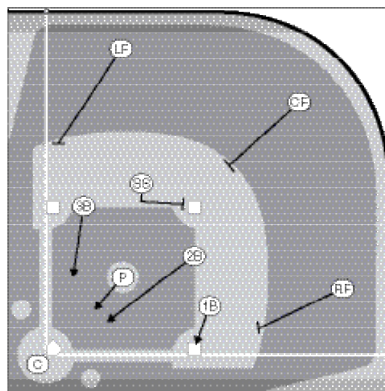**CF** Backs up second

RF Backs up first

TABLE 14.12 Normal Bunt Defense, Runners on First and Second

P   Throws mid-low fastball for a strike when shortstop slaps glove and covers third-base side for bunt responsibility. If he can get the ball he calls "Mine, mine, mine," and fires to the third baseman. If he can't get the ball and the third baseman fields the ball, he goes in front of him and covers third base.

1B Starts 15 feet from first-base grass and charges hard when batter squares. Listens to catcher for the call.

2B Cheats toward first base from shallow second and covers first base from right-field side.

SS Holds runner close at second base. As pitcher comes to stretch he jabs hard with left foot toward second base and claps glove hard, indicating to the pitcher to pitch. If runner is too far off, opens glove and runs daylight pickoff.

3B Plays slightly in front of third base with view of runner, pitcher, and hitter. Takes a couple of steps in on pitch and reads bunted ball. If pitcher calls for ball, he covers third base. If he reads that pitcher can't get the ball, he calls for the ball and makes the play at first base.

C   Covers in front of plate and calls where the ball should be thrown.
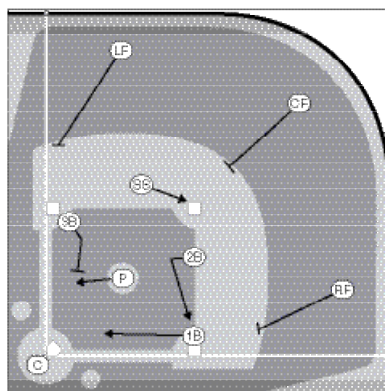
P	Throws a mid-low strike when he sees second baseman out of corner of his eye. Covers third-base line and calls ball. If he can't field ball, covers third base.
1B	Holds runner and stays on the bag.
2B	When pitcher comes set, breaks hard to home plate.
SS	Covers second base
3B	Plays slightly in front of base and reads bunted ball. If pitcher calls for ball, he covers third base. If pitcher doesn't call for ball, he comes in, fields ball, and makes the play to first base.
C	Calls play and has responsibility in front of plate.
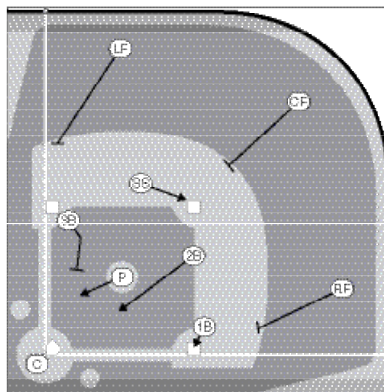
TABLE 14.14   Runners on First and Second Base,
Rotation Bunt Defense

P	Throws a mid-low strike and delivers ball when shortstop reverses direction and has the base runner beat by at least four steps. He then charges ahead and has responsibility in front of the mound.
1B	Charges toward home plate.
2B	Jabs two steps hard to second base, then covers first base.
SS	Starts in normal position. When pitcher gets down in stretch position, jabs two steps hard toward second base, slaps his glove in the same direction, and sprints to cover third base.

3B	Plays slightly in front of third base with view of runner, pitcher, and hitter. Reads shortstop. If shortstop has runner beat, charges toward home plate. If the runner comes with the shortstop to third base, he retreats to third base and prepares for a throw from catcher. If hitter squares to bunt, he has left-side responsibility.
C	Calls play and has short front responsibility.
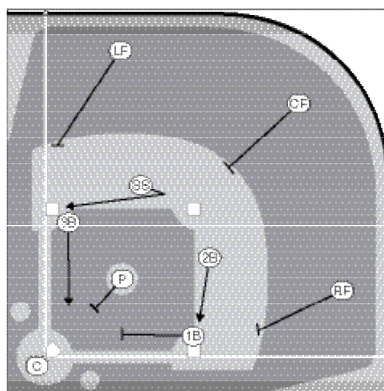
You want to use this aggressive bunt defense when you are sure that the offense is bunting. The play is designed to get the out at third base.

Intentional Walks

An intentional walk is used as part of defensive strategy only when second base or second and third bases are occupied with less than two outs, and when the batter is not the potential tying or winning run.

In giving an intentional pass, the pitcher should not lob the ball to the plate but should instead throw medium-speed fast balls about three feet outside and shoulder high.

Because he cannot leave the catcher's area until the pitcher releases the ball, the catcher stands up and extends his arm (for a right-handed batter) or glove (for a left-handed batter) to the side, and then takes a lateral step to receive the ball.

The primary objective of the intentional pass is to pitch to a more logical opponent while setting up a force or double play. The intentional walk is used only with first base open.

Ways to Break the
Opponent's Momentum

Through the course of a game, momentum, be it for your team or the opponent, can play a big role in the outcome of the day's event. You would like to think that how your opponent is playing that day will not affect the momentum of your team, but that is not always the case. Momentum is something that you want to keep on your side as much as possible; keep it in your dugout! Momentum can have a roller-coaster effect in which your team scores runs when emotions and intensity are high and gives up runs when intensity is low. This roller coaster can break a team down mentally and give them a feeling that they can't get over the hump. Keeping an even keel in your dugout is a sure way of getting the most out of your team that day. Breaking the opponent's momentum during the game can give them a topsy-turvy effect and give your team a win. Successful pitching and defense should set the tempo of the game.

Make Plays

Making plays on defense will keep your opponent from building momentum in a ballgame. Making a big play, such as a diving catch, a double play, or a strikeout to end an opponent's charge, can deflate the momentum of your opponent and give your team a big lift. Generally, you want a quick tempo when you are on defense.

Photo courtesy of Indiana University: by Paul Riley

Making a big play on defense will help deflate your opponent's momentum.

Answer Back

Offensively, you can answer back to break your opponent's momentum. Suppose your opponent goes out and scores two runs in the top of the first inning. Answering with two or more runs in the bottom of that inning can cancel that charge. In the same situation, a pitcher can answer back in the top half of the second inning by shutting them down with no runs. Your team will then have an opportunity to build on the two runs they scored previously to answer back. Whether from an offensive standpoint or by pitching and defense, answering back is an effective way to break your opponent's momentum.

Minimize Runs Given Up

Minimizing the runs you allow in specific situations can stall or even stop your opponent's momentum. Pitching coaches always tell their pitchers to stay away from the big inning (giving up a lot of runs in one inning). If you check the box score, the big inning is usually what causes a loss. During a game you will have situations when the other team has the start of a big inning. Walks, errors, or hits may result in your opponent putting runners in scoring position. If you can minimize scoring by giving up just one run instead of two or three, you can slow the momentum and may even stop the opponent's charge.

Let the Starting Pitcher Set the Tempo

The starting pitcher for the next game can build momentum in baseball. Whether you are coming off a win or a loss, the starting pitcher can dictate the flow and pace of the game. Momentum from his standpoint is going out and establishing that he is going to throw strikes and get outs. If he can do this for a team coming off a win, momentum will stay on your side. If he can do this coming off a loss, he can break the momentum of the opponent.

Slow the Pace of the Game

The coach can use several methods to help break the momentum of an opponent. Let's say a team is building a big inning or is on the verge of scoring a bunch of runs. A coach can slow the pace of the game by having his catcher go out to talk to the pitcher and slow things down. When the catcher is done, the coach can call time-out and go talk to the pitcher. This all slows the pace of the game, lets the pitcher gather himself, and may slow the other team's momentum. A coach may also want to slow the pace when the opponent is making a late-inning charge to steal the lead. A coach can go out to talk to the pitcher, or he can make some substitutions in the middle of the inning that will take time and slow down the game. Another way to slow the other team's charge is for players to stall. A player can use the trick-knee gimmick and act as if he has an injury. Another ploy is to make an equipment adjustment, which will take time and slow the game down so that the team can regain its composure.

Getting the Lead Out Versus Taking the Sure Out

When talking about getting the lead out versus taking the sure out, you need to consider several factors:

- The defensive alignment
- The score
- The inning
- Whether you are the home or visiting team

With those in mind, you can start to break down what plays can be made from the infield or outfield, either getting the lead out or the sure out. Remember always that if you are trying to get the lead out and the play becomes impossible, you need to take the sure out. It is never a mistake to get an out, any out!

Defensive Alignment

Several factors influence defensive adjustments. As coaches we analyze several variables before making any defensive decision—pitcher's strengths, type of hitter, type of pitch, negative or positive count, number of outs, field conditions, inning, and whether the team is home or the visitor. When we move our players in or out of different positions, we consider these variables seriously.

Infield Depths

Coaches can use three different alignments for their infielders: back, in, and double-play depth.

- *Back*—When the infield is playing back, all four infielders are back to the cut of the grass and trying to keep the ball in the infield to make the sure out.

- *In*—If the infield is in, all four infielders are far enough in to make a throw to cut off the run at home and get the lead out. Attempting to get the lead out in this situation usually means your team is losing or you are in a close game and want to stop another run from scoring.

- *Double play*—If the infield is at double-play depth, they are positioned not at the back of the infield but cheating in a little so that they can cut down the distance that the ball will travel on the ground. This positioning will give the infielders more time to make the double play. In the double-play situation, you are trying to get the sure out at second base, which will also be the lead out if there is only a runner at first when the ball is hit. The sure out will not be the lead out if runners are at both first and second when the ball is hit. In this case you will almost always try to get the sure out at second and then have an opportunity to get the out at first by completing the double play. Taking the sure out at second in this situation can lead to getting two outs as opposed to just one if you choose to take the lead out

at third. In this situation the only time you will try to get the lead out at third is when there are already two outs or when the ball is hit in the hole between the third baseman and shortstop and the only play the shortstop can make is at third base.

Outfield Play

The outfield may play many different alignments during a game. They can play in, deep (so that nothing can get over their heads), shade to the right, or shade to the left. Outfielders are aligned depending on where the hitter may hit or the situation of the game. Regardless of the alignment, where the outfielder will throw depends on where the ball is hit and how far it is from the outfielder. When a hit ball takes the outfielder away from the lead runner, the throw should always go to second base to keep the sure out at first. If a hit ball takes the outfielder toward the lead runner or if he can make the play with a strong throw, he should throw to get the lead out.

Caught Ball in the Air   When an outfielder can catch a fly ball by going toward the play, he should throw to try to get the lead out. When the outfielder catches a fly ball going away from the play on the lead runner, he should throw to second base (sure out) to keep the runner from advancing from first. The throw to second will keep the double play intact and keep the sure out at first if the next batter hits the ball on the ground. If the next batter hits the ball on the ground, you will have the opportunity to get a double play and stop the offensive charge.

Ball Hit on the Ground   On ground balls hit directly at the outfielder or two or three steps to his right or left, he should throw to get the lead out because he can make a strong throw to the lead base. In the same situation with the ball on the ground and five or more steps to his right or left, the smart play would be to throw to second base (sure out). The throw will keep the batter from advancing to second and keep the double play intact. If the next batter hits the ball on the ground, there is a chance to turn a double play. In almost all situations the outfielder should try to keep the double play intact (take the sure out) and not let the runner advance. Always trying to throw out the lead runner is the biggest mistake an outfielder can make because doing so can extend the inning and lead to more runs for the opponent, rather than being able to break the back of an inning.

Winning or Losing, Early or Late in the Game

When your team is winning, the emphasis will be on getting sure outs. The winning team will take sure outs to minimize the number of offensive opportunities the opponent has to regain the lead. Whether early or late in the game the winning team should give a run to get as many sure outs as possible. Late in the game the winning team should trade runs for outs. Getting

the lead out at second base in a double-play situation will be the best choice to get one or possibly two outs and stop the other team from advancing runners into scoring position. Getting the sure out at second in a double-play situation with the bases loaded or with runners at first and second may result in giving up a run, but it will draw the winning team closer to the 27 outs needed to end the game.

When your team is losing, the emphasis will be on stopping the opposing team from scoring any more runs. The team behind in the score will usually try to get the lead out if the runner is trying to score. A losing team will take the sure out early in a game if that out can be translated into a double play, even though a run may score. They will give up the run to get two outs, clear the bases, and stop any more runs from scoring that inning. Late in the game with a runner in scoring position, they will be trying to cut off the run by getting the lead out because they will not have many more opportunities to score runs. Cutting runs off late gives them a better chance to come back by scoring one or two runs.

Home or Visiting Team

The standard strategy in baseball is to play to win on the road and tie at home. If your team adheres to this strategy in the last inning of a game, you will need to make specific plays that translate into outs.

In this situation the home team will give up the tying run to get the sure out. They will concede the run because they know they have the bottom half of the inning to score a run and win a game. Getting the sure out, whether the front end of a double play or an out at first, will reduce the opponent's offensive opportunities to score the go-ahead run.

If you are the visitor in this situation, you must get lead outs or you will lose the game. Trying to turn a double play or taking an out at first without allowing the home team to score are the only two situations when the visiting team will take the sure out. Otherwise, the visitor will always try to cut off the winning run in the last inning of a game by getting the lead out.

Defending the Steal

A key to stopping the running game is to identify running situations and the players who can run. You should check the stat sheet for stolen bases and stolen bases attempted. In general, you can expect middle players or the one, two, and nine hitters in the lineup to be runners.

Good runners like to run early in the count, especially with two outs. Also, they often run with three balls on the hitter. They will run more in close games. Slower runners will try to run on breaking-ball counts and may try to delay steal, especially with a left-handed hitter at the plate.

Disrupting the base runner's timing. When a runner reaches base, the pitcher must upset his timing and rhythm. The simplest and most effective way to threaten a potential base stealer is to hold the ball and freeze the runner. The pitcher can disrupt the base runner's timing by varying the amount of the time he holds the ball on each pitch. On some pitches he can hold the ball longer, and on others he can go directly to the plate with only a slight pause. If the base runner is unsure when the pitcher will throw to the plate, he will become tense. His muscles will tighten up, and he is unlikely to get a good jump. Holding the ball until the base runner stops prevents the base runner from getting a walking lead. Additionally, the batter who is waiting will become anxious and begin to lose his concentration.

Statistics show that marginal base stealers have a significantly lower success rate when a pitcher throws to first at least once. A well-planned quick throw to first can be effective. Varying his moves is probably the best way for the pitcher to stop the running game. A quick step-off will chase the runner back to the bag and will often expose his intentions. When a runner slides headfirst back to first, it's a sign that he is going. A throw to first or a quick step-off will also cause the batter to tip his intentions.

Quickening the delivery to the plate. The pitcher can control the running game by speeding up his move to the plate and quickening his delivery to the plate. He should concentrate on minimizing arm and leg movement; the less wasted movement he has in his delivery, the easier it becomes to speed his release to the plate. He should think of his leg kick as a leg lift rather than vice versa. He should keep his arms close to his body and reduce the arc that his arm travels. He should get his arm up into a throwing position quickly. These techniques will speed up his delivery and improve his mechanics.

Slide step. The slide step is an effective way to slow down the running game. From the set position, the pitcher simply locks his hip and slides his lead leg close to the ground toward the plate. In essence, he is speeding up his time to home plate. If a normal leg lift is timed at 1.4 seconds, using the slide step would reduce the time to the plate to 1.2 seconds.

Pitchouts. Pitchouts are another way to slow down base runners. The purpose of the pitchout is to give the catcher an easy ball to handle so that he can get off a quick, accurate throw to second base. For a pitcher, the key on a pitchout is to stay compact, quicken the delivery, and throw a four-seam fastball high and away. He does not use a slide step when pitching out because the base runner will probably not go on the pitch. The pitcher can also use a modified pitchout, a pitchout thrown eye high just off the outside corner. A team that has the opponent's signals should use the modified pitchout because the opposition is less likely to suspect that their signs have been compromised. The modified pitchout is also used against teams who read pitchouts well.

Left-handers' advantages. Left-handers should have a good move to first base and be able to stop the running game better than right-handers can.

The pitcher can control the running game by quickening the delivery to the plate.

Many lefties have not developed a move to first base because most players do not run on lefties. The key is to keep all the actions of the pitch and pick the same so that the base runner has no key on an early read.

A left-handed pitcher can do a variety of things with his leg and arms. Left-handed pitchers must abide by two simple rules when picking to first base. The first rule concerns the leg lift. The stride leg must not cross the front plane of the rubber as it is being lifted. The second rule deals with the stride leg, which must land within a 45-degree angle from the center of the rubber.

Left-handed pitchers have the luxury of being able to freeze runners without throwing the ball to first base. One such move is called the shoulder turn. As the pitcher lifts his leg, he turns his right shoulder in toward the runner while keeping the left leg from crossing the plane of the rubber. He then delivers the pitch to the plate. This move will cause the runner to freeze or retreat to first base.

Read lift. The read lift is effective in slowing down the opponent's better base stealers. The read lift is a slow, deliberate lift of the leg without committing to either the base or the plate. The pitcher must read the runner and act accordingly. If the runner breaks toward second base, the pitcher steps down toward first and picks. If the runner freezes or retreats to first, the pitcher delivers the ball to the plate.

Step-back pitch. The step-back pick can be the quickest way for a left-hander to get the ball to the bag. The pitcher must step off the rubber with his left foot and throw the ball with a flicking action to the bag. A variation of this move would be not to throw the ball or to fake the throw. Because he has stepped off the rubber, a throw is not necessary.

Awareness of runners at second. When defending the steal, pitchers must be aware of runners occupying second base. Stealing third base can be much easier than stealing second for several reasons. Pitchers tend to have a slower count with a runner at second. Runners at second typically get bigger leads while taking walking leads. The runner will be in motion while taking his primary lead, which will increase his lead and make him quicker in getting a jump to run.

Inside move. The inside move is beneficial in deterring theft of third base. The pitcher executes the inside move by lifting the stride leg until it reaches its apex, turning the leg over and across the rubber, and stepping down to pick to second. This move can be effective only if the leg lift of the inside move resembles the leg lift of his normal delivery to plate. This particular move is great to use against aggressive runners, runners who put their heads down when they run, and in two-out, full-count situations when runners at first and second are running on movement.

Daylight, or open-glove, play. Other pickoffs to second or third are used with timing and communication within the team defense. One such strategy is the daylight, or open-glove, play at second. Either middle infielder will see daylight between the runner and bag. As the pitcher comes set, the shortstop will flash an open glove with his arm extended while he breaks to the bag. (The second baseman extends his right hand to execute the play.) The pitcher sees the open glove, immediately turns, and picks to the bag. This play takes timing, nonverbal communication, and the ability of the shortstop or second baseman to read daylight.

As we have seen in this section, defending the steal can involve a multitude of looks, counts, rhythm, and timing strategies. If a pitcher can learn to apply these techniques, he will surely be able to slow the running game of the opponent and control the game.

Buying Time for a Reliever

One of the most difficult situations for a coach during a game is changing pitchers. Many variables are involved in making this change, such as pitch count, struggling by the pitcher, and getting the relief pitcher warm. Sometimes a pitcher looks as if he is moving along well in a game, but in a matter of six or seven pitches, the opponent puts two or three runs on the scoreboard before the coach can get a reliever down to the bullpen. So how can we buy time for our relief staff to get ready?

When making a pitching change during a ballgame, the reliever usually comes into the game with runners on base in a tough situation. Therefore, the relief pitcher must be warm and ready to compete at his best. The best solution for giving your reliever time to prepare is to monitor your starting pitcher's pitch count. Once the starter has reached a certain number of pitches, you send the reliever to the bullpen to begin his warm-up. Although the starter may be pitching well, he is reaching a point of breaking down, and you are prepared when that begins to occur.

The most common strategy to buy extra time for your reliever is to stall. You and your players can use many stall tactics. The standard stall move is to send your catcher to talk to the struggling pitcher and follow that with a trip to the mound by a member of the coaching staff. The umpire usually will give the coach two to three minutes to confer with a pitcher before he walks out to break up the meeting. You have a choice of making the change or leaving the pitcher in the game. In this situation you have just enabled your relief pitcher to throw 15 to 20 more warm-up pitches.

In making a trip to the mound, the coach can either pull the starting pitcher or leave him in the game. If you leave the pitcher in the game, you cannot make another trip to the mound to make a change until the next batter comes to the plate. In essence, you have to roll the dice with that move. If you choose to leave the pitcher in the game and he makes it through that batter, you have given the reliever more time to warm up.

Players can talk to the pitcher to buy time for your reliever. An infielder can call time and confer with the pitcher. The catcher may then visit, followed by a coach, thus buying even more time.

Coaches can find themselves out of trips. In that case, using pitchouts and a series of pickoffs is a good tactic. Depending on the situation or where the base runner is positioned, pickoffs can give your relief pitcher time to get warm. Using inside moves to second base, pickoff throws to first base, or called picks with your infielders are good ways to gain extra warm-up time. Pitching around a hitter or calling pitchouts on consecutive pitches can lengthen time as well.

One of the most difficult ways to stall is slowing the starting pitcher's tempo. Tempo is how quickly the pitcher gets ready to throw the next pitch. We typically teach pitchers to have good, quick tempo. They get the ball,

step on the rubber, and are ready to pitch. We have to teach our pitchers to change their tempo during the game.

When your starter begins to break down, he can take more time between pitches to gain time for the reliever. He can clean his spikes, walk around the mound, wipe the sweat off, tie his shoes, tuck his uniform in, use any way to buy time to give the relief pitcher more pitches.

In all our strategies for buying time for our relievers, we must remember the eight pitches he will receive when entering the game. The situations will dictate the moves you should consider making. You end up playing a game of cat and mouse to put your players in the best situation to be ready to perform. A relief pitcher should warm up in the stretch position and get two of his pitches game ready, or one if time is limited. Try to give your relievers a general idea of their roles and how you will use them during a ballgame.

Pickoff Plays

The primary objective of a pickoff is to keep base runners close to bases and make an aggressive team more tentative. Pickoffs are important in helping a team control the running game. Pickoffs can also be effective in uncovering a team's offense in a bunt situation.

We try to emphasize quick feet and a quick upper body, short arm action, and accurate location on all pickoffs. The target location is two feet over the inside corner of the bag.

At First Base

First base. The pitcher throws to the first baseman, who is playing behind the runner. The catcher puts the pickoff on and reads whether there is daylight between the runner and the first baseman breaking in behind the runner. If daylight appears, the catcher pops his mitt and the pitcher throws to first base. If the runner breaks back to first base with the first baseman, the catcher drops his mitt and the pitcher steps back. The pitcher reads the catcher. With a left-handed pitcher on the mound, the first baseman breaks when the pitcher picks up the nonpivot foot and throws automatically to first.

Go hard. The first baseman puts on this play by stepping in front of the runner. The pitcher comes set. If the runner leads off beyond the first baseman, the first baseman will break to the bag and the pitcher will throw over. If the runner stays even with the first baseman, the pitcher reads this and throws to the plate. With a left-handed pitcher on the mound, the throw to first base is automatic.

At Second Base

Daylight. No sign is needed for this play. When the pitcher comes set, the shortstop comes up behind the runner and bluffs him back to second base. If the runner doesn't step back toward second base, the shortstop opens his glove and breaks to second base. If the pitcher reads daylight between the shortstop and the runner at second base, he throws to the bag at second base. If the shortstop does get the runner to step back toward second base, he slaps his glove, which signals the pitcher to pitch, and the shortstop steps back to his normal position.

Count play. The pitcher gets the sign from second baseman or shortstop, depending on who is covering. This is a timing play based on the back of the pitcher's neck. When the pitcher starts his stretch, one of the infielders will bluff the runner back to second base (the one not covering the bag). As the pitcher comes to the set position, he looks home and counts one thousand one, one thousand two. He then turns and fires to the other infielder, who has broken to cover second base after counting one thousand one. Either the shortstop or the second baseman can put the play on and cover the bag.

Go hard. This play involves an inside reverse pivot from the pitcher, who throws to the shortstop covering second base. The shortstop puts the play on and breaks when the pitcher starts his leg lift. The pitcher should get to a balanced position before starting his inside pivot toward second base.

16. The catcher puts on this play. The pitcher is in a windup position and reads the catcher. If the catcher sees daylight between the shortstop and the runner, he pops his mitt and the pitcher throws to second. If the catcher drops his mitt, the pitcher steps back because they have no play. This pickoff is used with the bases loaded or runners at second and third. The pitcher must read the catcher.

14. The catcher puts on this play for a pickoff at second base. The second baseman reads the runner. When the runner takes his longest lead, the second baseman will break to the bag. The pitcher, in a stretch position and looking at home, must be ready to throw when the catcher lifts his glove.

At Third Base

Go hard. From the stretch position the right-handed pitcher steps at 45 degrees to third base and fires to the third baseman covering the bag. The infielder breaks when the pitcher lifts the nonpivot foot. The left-handed pitcher reads third base by looking over his left shoulder from the stretch position. When the infielder breaks, the pitcher fires to the third baseman covering the bag.

15. The catcher puts on this play. The pitcher in windup position throws to third base or steps back off the rubber, depending on the runner. If the