

Pop Up Communication

I have been asked numerous times recently to discuss our approach to pop ups. Sounds like it should be a very simple approach to catch a simple pop up! Unfortunately, pop ups can be the cause of many sleepless nights when you have either very tentative outfielders or no communication has been successfully taught, practiced, and continued to be practiced throughout the entire season. Yes, we review our communication on a daily bases throughout the season. Communication is important to be successful in our game and also in life. At least my wife lets me know when I am not doing a very good job of communicating during my season. She often says that our marriage is sometimes on hold because of softball season!!

On the softball field, the verbiage that we select to use should be meaningful and well thought out. It does not have to be fancy, but it must be used by everyone on the team. The easiest way to break down communication is for everyone to use their own language and cause confusion. A simple example would be “mine, mine, mine”, “ball, ball, ball”, I got it etc. All of these mean the same thing but used in a stressful moment with lots of crowd noise, could be a result in disaster. I would like to explain to you the communication that we use and whether you agree upon the wording that we use, it only matters that these words mean something to our players and are the only verbiage used in our system.

The easiest way to begin teaching pop up communication is to use two lines. One line will consist of your outfielders and the other, your infielders. By hitting balls between these two, we begin to communicate who will make the catch. In our priority system, the outfielder always has priority over the infielder. Therefore, we have the infielder call “Ball” once and the outfielder call “Ball, Ball, Ball” multiple timesor until they make the catch. We will then add to the difficulty by adding more players involved. We go to a triangle where we have a 2nd baseman, 1st baseman, and outfielder. In this case, the Outfielder has priority over the infielders, 2nd baseman over the 1st baseman. Our communication will be Outfielder calls ball multiple times, 2nd baseman calls it once if going back toward the outfield and multiple times if the pop up is behind the 1st baseman. We have begun to set some guidelines for communication. Here is a simple way to communicate by first of all setting some priorities. The player that has the priority calls the ball multiple times and the non-priority calls it once. Our Centerfielder has priority over our left and right fielders, all outfielders have priority over the infielders, shortstop over 2nd baseman, middle infielders have priority over the corners, corners have priority over the pitcher and catcher.

I have found the best way to work on communication is by breaking the drill down to 2 lines - infielders and outfielders, a triangle – outfielder, and 2 infielders (middle and corner), then 4 people using the center fielder and right fielder, 2nd baseman and 1st baseman. Ultimately you can put your players at their position and use the entire field. When everyone is in place, the only thing we change is to have our centerfielder use “GET OUT, GET OUT” multiple times and the off outfielder uses “BALL, BALL, BALL”. Whatever you choose to use as your verbiage must be used by all, easy to say, and meaningful to your defensive language.