

# Bunt Defense

A few things should be worked on early in the preseason to be successful at any type of defense-infield or outfield. These suggestions make any defense that you decide to use better.

1. Check the toe positioning of your players. For quickness, the toes should be slightly in versus out when standing. Try standing with your toes straight, then shift them out and then shift them in. You will notice that your weight goes forward when the toes are shifted in. This makes the player quicker and lighter on their feet.
2. The player's glove for softball should be broken in so that the last finger and the thumb side are even when the glove is off the hand. If the thumb side is lying somewhere across the other fingers of the glove, it is not broken in for softball. It can be changed by soaking briefly in water (rainwater is great) and allowing it to dry with a softball in it closer to the heel of the glove not the webbing. Then tie the glove shut and allow it to dry naturally.
3. Check to see where the players have their fingers while in the glove. For softball, they should have the little finger and the ring finger in the last hole, the middle finger in the next and the index finger in the next. This leaves the original index finger hole open. This shift allows the hand to be partially out of the glove, allows for a lot better range, and allows the glove to snap shut when catching the ball. The players will say that their two fingers will not fit in the last hole but they will fit. I told my players that it was not an option, cram them in and they will soon form to those two fingers and fit. After a while, your players will love to hold it that way. This will help the player at any position but especially the ones that are close and get a hard shot to the side of them. The glove will snap shut on the ball versus bouncing out. The hand can't snap the glove closed fast enough, shifting the fingers helps it automatically snap shut.
4. Check to make sure the gloves are very clean. If the gloves have dirt in them, the ball will spin out. I tell the players to clean their gloves thoroughly before the season and to keep a towel in their bag to wipe them out after each use and even during a game if there is a lot of dust on the field. I also remind them to keep their bags zipped during the time it is on the field or in the dugout so dirt will not get into it. They are also to keep their dirty shoes away from their glove by keeping them in a separate area or in a plastic bag.

When I do clinics, I am amazed that an extremely small percentage of gloves are clean and broken in correctly. Almost no one has their hands switched to have two fingers in the last hole. If the player is good enough to get the ball into their glove, it should stay there. But, how many times do we see the player drop the ball for an error. My guess is 98% are errors on the glove instead of the player.

5. Make sure the corner players are down, toes in with the weight shifted forward, the hands are out in front with the glove open to the hitter. Do not allow any players to have their throwing hand on the glove while in a defensive position or the glove facing to the outfield versus towards the hitter. This all takes time to then get into the fielding position. The player should give a little hop just before the ball reaches the hitter. This puts the player in motion versus dead motion, which is slower.

Once those things are taken care of, it makes any defense a lot easier.

## How to Defend a Bunt:

1. We have our corners in tight almost all of the time. If we know it is a dead pull hitter who is not a threat to bunt at all, we may pull back a little but not a lot on the pull side. If we do that, we have the weak side player in closer to the hitter. Third base back farther, first base is in closer. First base back, third base in. On the offensive side, I teach everyone to bunt to draw the defense in which makes it easier to swing away and hit the ball by them. Even our slowest players will either fake a bunt to draw the infield

in or will bunt if the defense is back. Every bunt for a base hit, no matter who is bunting, is definitely on the run. If it is one of the slower right-handed kids, they may do a one handed bunt by dropping the bat down parallel to the ground by their right hip. The ball passes right by their moving body and the 3B/SS cannot see the ball being bunted. This is very effective but has to be practiced.

2. We may play over to the left a little at 3B with a faster pitcher to see if they can bunt down the 3B line on us. Most have not been taught to bunt down the lines, which is something we work on everyday. Offensive, use a pitching machine with four players ready to bunt one at a time. Use the sidelines and place a cone about 1-1 1/2' from the foul lines about 30' away from the plate. The hitters/bunters get one pitch and keep rotating. This goes very quickly and they are to bunt between the line and the cone on each side. We practice this almost everyday and we are known for being an excellent bunting team.
3. READ THE HITTER:
  - a. Bat low - throw high;
  - b. Bat angled - throw a drop curve, hand under the bat instead of behind the bat;
  - c. Throw high, bat not covering the whole plate;
  - d. Throw outside, hands close or across the plate;
  - e. Throw inside, on a good bunter who runs (which they all should be on the run when bunting for a base hit)
  - f. Throw inside - jam her.
4. The normal person to cover first is the second baseman, with a runner on first the shortstop covers second for a sacrifice. We always try to get the lead runner. We teach the players: to read the running speed of the runner on first, read the running speed of the hitter, they should know the strength of their own arm and they then assess the speed of the bunted ball.

They should know by that if they can get the runner at second. If there's:

**Speed on first** - ball has to be sharply hit to the player or the player has to have a gun of an arm.

**Medium speed runner** - ball can be of medium speed with a strong arm throw.

**Medium to slow** - medium speed ball, medium arm

**Slow runner** - definitely go to second and the batter should probably do a slap bunt or hit and run instead of a sacrifice. All of this has to be practiced and evaluated during scrimmages to see who can do a consistent slap bunt or hit and run.

5. Runners on first and second-shortstop covers third for the force out. Second base covers first. We leave second base open unless an outfield is fast enough to cover on a sure sacrifice bunt. We would normally go third to first anyway for a double play, not third to second.

6. A couple of times when we really need an out at third in a sacrifice bunt situation, we will bring the weakest outfielder in to cover third when there are runners on first and second. Of course, the player has to be able to catch a hard throw from an infielder, which in college should not be a problem but may in a high school that has a limited number of players. This takes away the "race to third" if the runner on second is fast and the batter is not a good place hitter. Of course, if we leave the right field line open, the pitcher cannot throw an outside pitch on a right-handed hitter. That would not be wise. This defense really shakes up the bunter and practically takes the bunt away. Again, the pitcher cannot throw a pitch in the direction of an area where there is no player.
7. The first baseman should field the bunt on her side not in front of her when going to first and most of the time to second. The same for the third baseman fielding the bunt and going to third. When they field the ball, a foot should be toward the plate and the other toward the base that they are going to throw the ball to for the out. They stay down on the throw instead of standing up to save time. The throw is more of a sidearm flip to the base. The player fielding the ball in front of them, standing up to throw and throwing overhand takes a lot of time that the baseperson doesn't have in throwing out a runner.
8. We do a lot of cat hops, which are fielding the ball and jumping to the throwing position instead of standing up and then moving to target to throw. That's too slow. We practice all types of throws and use runners while practicing so they know exactly how much time they have to throw. Again, they are always assessing the speed of the ball and the speed of the runners along with the strength of their arms.

**Good Luck!**

**Look for Cheleste's article next month.**