

Harassing the Other Team without Saying a Word

I am a big believer in learning how to run the bases aggressively. A couple of things that we really work on during our fall scrimmage season are not only to teach the players how to correctly run the bases, slide according to the situation and do dive backs but how to do it very aggressively. This leads to the player having a lot of confidence during the game in their running ability and they also have a lot of fun executing it.

We use a rocker start and teach them to put their left foot on the outfield side of each base. Some coaches like their players to start in front of the base or some like to start facing the catcher. I personally like the players to do a rocker start. Their left foot can be hooked on the outfield side of the base for a push off (when they are on the outside part of the base, they will not catch their right foot on the base as they begin to run) or they can put it on the ground with the left side of their foot touching the outfield side of the base. This works well especially when wearing metal spikes. This is the player's preference according to the hardness of the base. Some players do not feel comfortable with their foot hooked on a hard base so they put their foot along side the base, but are still in contact with the base.

We do a three step start but it is an aggressive three step start. We teach our catchers and infielders to watch how the other team leads off the bases. If they start with their right foot on the base instead of their left, they either have to take a two step start or a four step start. If it is two steps, we know that their start will not be as big and they will be slower to second. If they take a four step start, we pick them off unless they take extremely small steps. The players and especially the catcher have to check which foot is on the bag when the other team is on base.

When your player takes a leadoff, their feet should **NEVER** be still. They continue to move their feet even if it is in place. Here again, if we see a runner take a lead off and come to a dead stop with the feet planted and the hands down at her side, we will call a pick off. When we are running, we see what the catcher is like (not paying attention to the runner, intimidated by runners or a catcher who will try to pick us off) and then we know how far we can really jump off the bases. As the player gains that knowledge, they will take their start and do a couple of slide steps towards the next base if we think we can push the catcher a little. On the return to their base, they do the fundamental loco motor skill of sliding back to the base (slide sideways back to the base never taking their eyes off of the catcher, or turning their back on the next base). We teach our players to watch how the other team goes back to a base -- *do they slide back or turn there back on the next base and take their eyes off the ball. If they take their eyes off the ball*, we will try to pick them off.

By not turning their back on the next base and by always watching the play, the runner has a chance to advance if the defense drops the ball. If they turn their back on the play, they almost never have that opportunity.

The player's hands on the leadoff are at their waist in front of the body. That is a speed, quick position. If the hands are held down at their sides, it is a slow position.

Drill: Right from the beginning of our fall scrimmage season workouts, we start working on base running and lead offs. I feel this is an extremely important part of the game. The first day there is soft dust on the field, we divide the entire team on the bases including at the plate. We work on lead offs on command by saying "break" and then as they take the three step lead off we yell "*dive*" if we want them to dive back into the base, "*slide back*" is we want them to slide back watching the ball or "*steal*" if we want them to take off to the next base. They never know which we will say. If we want them to take two bases, we just say "*steal two*". You can add a slide on the steal, you can add a slide on a steal and then yell "*go again*" and they scramble up and take off for the next base. By using all four bases, the players get a lot of repetitions in a short amount of time. You can add any type situation that you want.

Dive Backs:

When the players dive back into the base, they dive away from the direction that the ball is coming from and turn their face away from the ball. Normally, they simply pivot on the left foot and dive with their right hand going to the back corner of the base away from the throw. Work on them just pivoting and diving instead of taking a step or two before they dive. Remember, that the hands are in front of the waist for quickness. As they pivot and dive, the right hand heads for the back corner of the base.

During a game, we want the players to be very aggressive. We will motion to the player to take a bigger lead. Again, the feet do not stop and the hands are in front of the waist. When we have a runner on second or on third and one at first, we will instruct the runner on first to go halfway or more. They have to be **very mobile and alert** but it really puts the pressure on the defense. If we have bases loaded, we will have the players on first and second go half way. Of course, it will depend on the situation, score, etc. **When I hear the defense say "I don't know what they are going to do" -- I know that we are going to win.** You want to keep the defense guessing. You want the catcher to be watching your runners and thinking of what they may be doing. If the catcher is watching the runners, the pitcher sees the catcher's attention is somewhere other than on the pitches. The infield also sees the catcher worried about the runners and they become worried about the runners. **Therefore, you are harassing the other team without even saying a word.**

Good Luck!

Look for Celeste's article next month.