

Is a Slide Just a Slide?

I believe in being elusive on the bases. I believe in not giving the defense any easy outs. I believe that you should always look for a way to be safe.

What your player does when they are on the bases determines the difference between out and safe. Just like the lead offs and dive backs discussed in the last article are the **beginning** of going to the next base, what the player does when they get to that base is just as important.

It goes unsaid that the runner on a steal goes and doesn't look back or to the catcher, their goal is to get to the base safely. Working on the techniques of sprinting during practices, really help players improve their speed. You can improve your team speed but you have to work at it. The slide is just as important as the break and the technique of sprinting. If a player is on a steal and slides directly to the base in a straight line from one base to the next, more times than not, they will be out.

The reason is that the runner sliding straight into the base is closer to the fielder catching the ball. It always frustrates me to watch a baseball game on TV where most of the players who slide into the base go straight in and they are called out most of the time. Another reason not to go straight in is the umpire. The umpire has a split second to make a decision and they cannot see every angle in that split second. The result is a "judgment" call that cannot be disputed. The first base coach on a slide into second may have the best view. However, that is not where the umpire is positioned. So, to leave no question in the umpires mind and, also, to stay away from the tag-due an avoidance slide.

What is an avoidance slide? Whether you slide feet or head first, it is a fade away slide. When going feet first on a steal, your right foot is out in front and goes way right of the base (ball coming from the catcher). The line of the body is also to the right of the base. The left toe catches on the first base outfield side of the base. That is the side closest to first base and the side closest to the outfield. The left toe hooks on to the base and the left hand is directly behind the left foot. In case the left toe comes off the base, the left hand is there to catch the corner of the base.

I like to teach a headfirst avoidance slide going into second and third on a steal or on base hits going home to first or first to third. I think it is faster than the feet first slide. Some say the player cannot pop up as quickly but I think they can just push up with the hands and they are up and ready to go. Plus, if they break/crack/chip a finger on the slide, it is possible for them to continue to play in some capacity for the team during the season. If they do that to a foot, they are probably out for an extended period of time. The players love going headfirst after they practice it. At first, it is scary for them, but after that, they really get into it.

On a head first slide, the player runs straight from the previous base and on the slide heads their body to the far right of the base. Their left arm aims for around a 10 o'clock position to catch that corner of the base just like the feet first slide. As they grab on to the base, their body will spin around the base if they are light enough. If the hand comes off, they can drag the left toe on to the base as they go passed it.

Our players loved to slide head first. They were afraid at first because they were never taught to do it. We started to teach them the following ways:

1. During the fall when the weather was hot/warm, we would hose down an area on the grass (in an out of play area so as not to harm the field), put down an indoor base and told the players to run as fast as possible and dive. We would go over the dive and how to get the feeling of diving over a line. Sometimes we would put a rope down for them to dive over. We told them to brush the ground with the hands first that are outstretched and then go to the chest. We had to really work on the ones who wanted to go to their knees first by using the rope for them to dive over. Displacing the force over a large area reduces the shock of hitting the ground. **Again, displacing the force of the dive over a large area instead of crashing directly into the ground in front of them reduces the shock of hitting the ground. The faster they run, the easier it is to do.**

2. During the winter practices, we would go to the wrestling room and put down a blanket or sheet along with the base and do the same as we did on the grass. The players got to the point where in the gym they eliminated the mat and just used the blankets which allows the players to slide on the floor. During scrimmages in the gym, the players would wear sweats and batting gloves and slide all of the time. **NOTE: Do not have a player slide feet first in the gym with tennis shoes on. That is asking for a sprained ankle. Also, the players wear batting gloves so they do not get floor burns when sliding into the base.**

The players also need to work on sliding to the inside part of the base. If the ball is coming to the base from the outfield, the player has to slide away from the tag. The technique is the same; it is just on the other side of the base. **PRACTICE BOTH WAYS.**

We continually stressed speed on the bases even to our slowest players, getting a good jump, using correct form when sprinting and using the correct stride. This made us a constant threat on the bases. With generous leadoffs while not having dead feet (keep the feet moving or the player is dead motion), the ability to dive back, correct sprinting form and using the very aggressive headfirst avoidance slide, your team will also be known as a constant threat on the bases. Just the thought of your team being a threat on the base by the other team and the actions of your players on the bases during the game, will create problems for the other teams defense. And that is what you as a coach wants to achieve. Take the other team out of their game with aggressive base running and slides. **PRACTICE IT!**

Good Luck!

Look for Celeste's article next month.