

## Try This with a Runner on Third

We have all been in the position of having a runner on third base at a crucial time in the game. The game is on the line, or it is an extremely close game of great importance. So, what do we do?

We came up with a play, back in 1989, that has worked for us through the years. The idea is to tag the batter base runner before she gets to first base. In doing this, it freezes the runner on third, most of the time. If the runner on third goes on the throw, the first baseman just receives the ball and immediately throws home. The first baseman is actually closer to home, thus making it a shorter throw to home.

With a runner on third and less than two outs, the infielders signal the play by usually just saying "15." That happened to be the number of the first baseman, the year we started using the play. It was no secret that we would do that- there was nothing for the other team to steal if they heard it, plus the other team would have to come up with something to counter it (which never happened). If it didn't work, it was because we failed to execute the play. The number stuck with the play, through the years, even though the players changed.

Here's how each player makes this play work.

### The first baseman's role

If the ball is hit to the shortstop, pitcher or third baseman, the first baseman goes immediately a third of the way to the plate-so that's about 20 feet from first base to the plate. The player fielding the ball throws to the first baseman at that spot. The first baseman is right by the foul line but is not blocking or obstructing the runner. She receives the ball and tags the runner with both hands. The ball is actually in the player's hand- no longer in her glove. This is important when she does this, because she will be ready to make the throw home before the tag (if the runner is breaking for home) or immediately after the tag. This takes less time than having the ball out of the glove before making the throw home. Time is precious when trying to throw out the runner going home, so she has to already have the ball in her hand. The player also keeps the glove around the ball and throwing hand so that the runner cannot knock the ball out of her hand during the tag.

The first baseman may have to adjust to a few things during the play. It's great to say the play works perfectly all of the time; but, in reality, the first baseman has to be ready for anything. Here are some things that may happen that the first baseman has to be aware of and react to.

**The ball is off line:** Get the ball first and then attempt to tag the runner-but get the ball first.

**The player fielding the ball is slow in throwing or the batter base runner is extremely fast:** The first baseman may have to back peddle some, to "buy" time until she gets the ball, in order to tag the runner. They have to practice the back peddling- and actually everyone should do agility drills to improve their coordination and quickness. But practice the back peddling to insure that the first baseman is good at it.

### The role of the players fielding the ball

The player fielding the ball has to throw the ball right away to the first baseman. There is no need to look the runner back to the third base: if they do look her back, the play will probably not work. They have to throw immediately to the first baseman and let the play happen. They also need to throw the ball just the way they would if they were throwing to first base. Don't let them try to aim the ball too much or be too careful or lob the ball. Just throw the ball normally to the first baseman.

If the batted ball goes to the second baseman, normally the runner will run home so the defensive player will throw home. If the runner doesn't break, it is just a short throw to first, and the first baseman should be ready to quickly throw home if the runner tries to go home or look her back if she doesn't break on the throw.

### The role of the second baseman

The second baseman covers first base as an outlet if the ball goes to any other infielder. If for any reason the play to the first baseman is broken, the fielder then gets the out at first, with the second baseman covering that base. She also has to be ready to tag the base and throw home in case the runner breaks and goes home.

So, here's the play: Runner on third, less than two outs. Ball goes to the pitcher, third baseman or shortstop.

They immediately throw to the first baseman, approximately 20 feet in front of first. She then tags the runner and holds the girl at third or throws home if she makes the break to home. The second baseman covers first, in case the play doesn't happen like that, in order to get an out there. The second baseman is ready to throw home to get the runner.

This play works but takes practice. Once they understand the concept, practice it just like you would any infield play. The players love this play and really focus on it with a runner at third. It gives them so much confidence mentally when they pull it off and get the runner or stop the runner from scoring. The more they do it, the more they want to do it. You can see that what normally is a scary situation and a pressure situation becomes a mental lift to the team, and you can actually see them wanting the ball to come to them so that they can make the play. Good luck - all it takes is a little practice.