

Verbal Signals

There are a lot of times, when coaching third, that you cannot give your hitter or runner signals by your hands. For example, you give your hitter a signal and after she turns her back, if she is a right-handed batter, the defense shifts to a different alignment. In cases like this, you need to have verbal signals ready to give them. Even when using hand signals, my signals are very easy, and I never use the counting-of-touches method or have an indicator. I want the players to worry about hitting—not try to figure out what I want them to do. In over 30 years, I had to change a couple of my signals a handful of times because a team would pick them up. I give signals before every pitch when we are in certain situations—especially if I am trying to get the infield defense guessing at what we are going to do.

I believe in running a fast offense with a lot of different things going on to confuse or "push" the defense to think and move. When I hear the infielders saying to each other "I don't know what they are going to do," I know we are going to win. By using verbal signals, it allows you to give the signals quickly and often. Here is an example: You have given your hitter the bunt sign and, when she turns away from you, the defense shifts in closer. First of all, in preparing your team, the hitters should always be able to read the defense, but they may not know in some situations what you would really like them to do. For those cases, and just to be sure you and the student/athlete are on the same page, have a verbal signal like "You know your options" which may mean that they are free to attack the pitch or maybe do a slap bunt or a fake slap bunt if the initial call for a bunt will not work. Even with no one on, the "Know your options" signal would mean to check where the defense is because the time may be right to drop a bunt for a base hit. You might say "Sting it," which means to attack and hit the ball, or "Look for it," which might mean to look for the infielders charging and to push the ball past them.

My job is to watch the defense and their alignment and then make a decision and pass it on to the player. "Take it with you" tells the left-handed hitter to drag bunt down the first-base line. "Come on, 12" (the hitter's number) or "Get that bat out" means bring it to third. When bunting for a base hit to third, they have to get the bat away from their bodies to be able to push their right hand out to third, while pulling their left hand into the body. It is just the opposite with the hands for a lefty—but the same idea and call. Side note: The hitters already know that we do not bunt to the middle of the field unless it is a squeeze or maybe a sacrifice. If we are bunting for a base hit, it will be down the lines. "Be a rabbit," "Be a bunny," "Come on, rabbit," or "Come on, bunny" means to bunt for a base hit. It is very fast to use some verbal cues, and usually the other team is not paying attention to those—especially since I talk to the players a lot while they are up to bat. I always say things like "You can do it," "Attack the ball," "Sting it," "Be aggressive," etc. Sometimes it is easy to slip in a "Come on, rabbit" or "Take it with you."

If the runner is on base and I want her to steal when the opportunity arises, I might say "Watch that baseline," which means, if the SS goes in front of the baseline and she is the cover, steal third. If the third baseman is covering third, I would say, "Watch that creeping," which means, if the third baseman creeps in a little, steal. If the runner is on first or second, and the catcher is going to her knees as she throws the ball back to the pitcher, I would say something about knees—"Watch the knees," "Keep the knees going," anything like that—and the player would steal as the catcher is going to her knees.

With a runner on and a sacrifice bunt called, if the hitter is attempting to bunt with the bat above the ball and with a downward motion, I would give a hand signal mimicking that. Or, if not a hand signal, I would give the verbal signal "Watch the bat" or "If the bat's high....", and the runner would know she should go ahead and steal the base (even if the hitter misses the ball) because the distraction even of an attempted bunt should give them enough time to make it to the next bases.

There are more verbal signals we use, but you need to come up with cues that are common to your team, that fit the situations. You cannot always use hand signals, and verbal signals are very effective and very easy to use.