

# Reading the Defense

I love aggressive softball. The players love aggressive softball. The spectators love aggressive softball. So, let's be aggressive in all aspects of the game. I loved to bunt, steal, hit and run, and more when the chance was given to us.

I have a hard time watching baseball games. How many times do we see a runner of third in the late inning with their team losing by one or tied, the infield back and no one squeezes the run in. Then they lose the game. I just do not understand it. You must tie the game to possibly win the game first, then you must be ahead in runs to win. And it's not only baseball, I am now seeing it in softball.

The **coach** controls the speed of the offense. A big part of controlling the offense is being able to **read the defense**. Each defensive player will have their own way of playing their position.

If a team is full of hitters that can get hit after hit, then I guess the coach doesn't have to give signals or use strategy to produce runs.

However, I don't believe I have ever seen a team like that. I have, however, seen game after game lost because there was a lack of strategy used to win the game or a lack of taking advantage of what the defensive team is giving the offensive team.

The coaches especially the third base coach who usually calls the signals, needs to watch the defensive players to be able to pick them apart and be able to call the plays for the offense.

Please do not just let your players hit away all the time. All players have specific skills and it is up to the coach to find them out and then use them to their advantage during the game.

Here are some things to watch as the third base coach:

\*infielder's toes-if the toes are pointed outward versus turned inward, the defensive player will be slower getting to the ball or covering a base since outward toes puts the player on their heels.

**Good time to bunt for a hit when a player is on their heels.**

**Good time to steal when the defense is on their heels.**

**(A bunt for a hit is different than a sac bunt. It is a surprise bunt, on the run when the ball is contacted.**

**The finer point of bunting for a base hit takes practice and teaching by the coach. After the skill is perfected, it is easy and a lot of fun after that. There are a few different**

**ways to bunt for a hit also. The coach needs to know various ways to bunt for a base hit to be to tell the player which one would be the best to use against the defense).**

**But basically, the batter is on the run when they contact the ball and must have at least one foot in the box and the other in the air. The batter must be able to put the ball down the lines in fair territory or in a hole in the defense.**

**\*outfielders that are not moving on every pitch (planted in one spot)-the outfielder will be slower moving to a play or the ball since they are dead motion. If their feet are moving while the pitch is being delivered, they will get a better jump on the ball.**

**Good time to take an extra base when an outfielder is dead motion.**

**\*Runner on second and the SS is playing in front of the line between second and third. Good time to steal third if 3B moves up the line. A fake bunt will draw 3B up if needed. Yes, the SS will then cover but if they are in front of the line, it makes it harder to turn and go back towards third base and make the tag.**

**Teach the player to read where the player covering 3B sets up for the tag. Probably the tag will be on the infield side of the third. If so, teach the runner to read that and slide away from the tag.**

**\*Third and first playing back  
Good time for bunting**

**\*Third and first move up closer to the plate  
\*Good time for an attack/slap bunt-key to not popping the ball up is to keep the bat flat and high in a bunt position, keep it totally flat when pulling it back and attacking forward.**

**Another key is that the bottom wrist of the batter needs to be down towards the ground and under the bat. This will allow the bat to stay parallel to the ground. Otherwise, if the wrist is above the handle of the bat, the bat will not lay flat/parallel to the ground and the bat head will go up.**

**Allowing the top of the bat head to become vertical will cause a pop up or a swing and miss. An attack bunt is a very fast attack forward hitting off the front foot. Hitting off the back foot will cause a swing and miss or pop up. Practice makes the difference in performing this along with teaching to attack forward.**

**\*Bunting for a base hit  
\*Reading the defense is vital to a fast offense and the threat of a bunt will open the hitting lanes. When the threat of a bunt for a hit is there, it also makes the defense**

**split their focus between the offense always hitting away or maybe bunting for a hit. The more pressure on the defense, the more mistakes could be made.**

If the offense is only one dimensional, it makes it easier on the defense to know where to position themselves.

If a team can do many different things offensively, then the defense needs to really know how to position themselves for every batter, read each hitter in case they have been taught to bunt, hit, hit and run, slap, slap bunt, steal, double steal, delay steal, squeeze and more.

All these skills need to be **taught and practiced** until perfected. It can be done. Make it a priority. It takes the coach to **teach** the skills, monitor during practice to make sure they are done correctly and pull the strings on third to set the offense in motion.

When the third base coach hears the team say to one another “I don’t know what they are going to do next” you know you have them.