

So How Are The Fields That You Play On?

Preparation is everything. Every aspect of the game and any situation that could possibly occur during a game should to be discussed and practiced earlier with the players. If that is done, then there should be a low number of surprises that happen during the course of a game. Players will automatically recognize what is happening and know how to handle every situation that may arise.

Everyone sees the games on TV and sees the fields that are the best around. But we all know that unfortunately the vast majority of the fields do not look like those. I spent 30 years at a college and every day was an adventure. Early in my career we didn't have any fences except behind homeplate. After we had the fences put in, we fought the battle of rocks in the dirt for a while. Before every game we had to rake and pick rocks off the infield. After a rain, more would surface. Then there was the battle in right field since the field sloped down towards the right field foul pole. There were at times holes in the outfield that we filled on many occasions, an infield that was almost never level, dirt that was rock hard or fluffy on different occasions and grass that we had to fight to get cut. The best though were the drains (2' by 2') put in by the fences in direct line with first and third base. Those appeared over the summer and I had no knowledge that they were going in. They were there for two seasons and had to be covered by a heavy rubber mat until we could get them moved and off the field. Every year was a battle just getting the best field prepared for our games.

Those of you that have fields like this know that the change it takes to fix them does not come easily especially in an educational institution. There is a lot of delay and red tape. So to be able to continue to play, you make it the best you can and teach your players how to adapt to it. Fields at some schools that we played on had the same problem so we had to prepare for every situation. The **attitude** of each team member playing in these conditions is a huge factor in being successful. The **coach's attitude** toward

playing under these conditions has to be one of confidence and that they can beat any team, any weather condition and any field condition. That attitude from the coach has to be shown to the players. The players will follow the coach's lead.

If the coach outwardly complains about the conditions and acts worried or starts using excuses, the players will pick that up and follow that attitude. With that being said, the coach needs to make sure the field is safe to play on and has to discuss the field with the powers to be at the school or park. Those discussions, however, are for the coaches only and not for player's ears.

These field conditions may occur occasionally for the defense to handle during a game. These situations need to be incorporated into practices until everyone fully understands how to handle them.

Things to be remembered about all fields-

- not all fields are perfectly maintained in fair territory
- not all fields will be level
- not all fields will be free from clumps and /or rocks
- not all fields will be maintained properly in foul territory

Can your team play on fields that have the following conditions:

- loose or thick dirt
- hard packed mud after a rain
- very hard infields
- slopes in the field especially in the outfield
- holes in the outfield
- ruts in the outfield or the infield
- obstacles in foul territory such as a tarp or other equipment
- tall grass or grass clumps in the outfield

It is extremely important that the players survey the fields before each game and look for potential problem areas such as holes in the outfield, slopes in the field, grass clumps and the general condition of the infield. The infielders need to smooth-"manicure" their areas. That means whenever they are playing defense, they look at their area for any problem spots like rocks, divots or rough

areas and smooth them out. ***Prevention of problems is better than reacting to a bad hop. They may have to do this every inning that they go onto the field.***

The players need to realize if there is a slope in the field especially if right field has a downward slope towards the outfield fence. The right fielder needs to be able to read the spin of the ball and the slope to be able to successfully cut the ball off.

The first baseman needs to learn which way to play first is the best. Some coaches like the foot on the base early. If a first baseman does that and there is a late break in the throw, it may be hard to recover to catch or block the ball from going down the first base line. Straddling the base in fair territory with their heels about 4" to the base and having their body square to the throw, may be a better way to cover the base. When the first baseman assesses the path of the ball, they can pop their foot on the base. If the throw goes wild, this allows them to slide their foot to a different position on the base and will prevent the ball from going into the outfield. This is very, very important when the field slopes down to the outfield fence.

Some fields will have a "lip" between the dirt and grass around the back of the infield. The fielders need to realize that the ball may hit that and pop up and over the fielder coming to the ball.

Practice, practice, practice catching balls in foul territory. Obstacles can be placed so they learn to go around a coach or equipment that might be in the way.

Being mentally prepared and mentally tough when playing in these conditions is imperative. Each player has to use "mind over matter" and focus on the game not the elements they are playing in during the game. They must be prepared for bad hops by being on their toes and off their heels. They should take no ball for granted and focus on looking the ball into the glove every time. Backing up all plays is extremely important, every player is moving on every play. Teamwork is the key.