

## Outfield Mechanics/Play



Playing the outfield has a persona at the youth level that turns some youngsters from enjoying the game of baseball, but many of the great Major League Baseball players played in the outfield. The reason is that they get stuck in the outfield because they struggle with throwing, fielding, and/or catching. Outfielders are vital members of helping a team win games on defense. They have the opportunity to make momentum changing plays like Ryan Braun or Mike Trout (above).

Playing the outfield at the youth level can help maximize other skills that can help ball players that play multiple positions. How to judge a soft line drive, a high pop with the swirling wind, know how to hit your cut man, the importance on going back on a baseball, and communication. Let's get to work and learn how to become the best outfielder we can be.

### Fielding/ Ready position

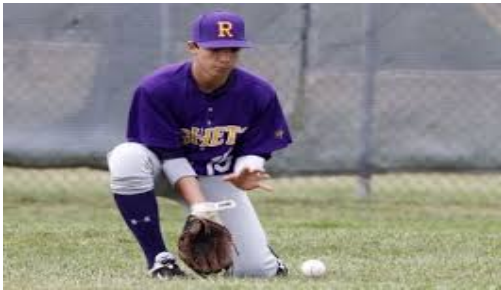
As the pitcher is delivering the pitch, the outfielder will want to take his pre-steps/ready steps. Once the ball is entering the hitting zone is when he/she needs to have both feet on the ground ready to explode in the direction of where the ball is heading, especially on a ground ball. Taking a look at the picture below, you will notice that the is in an athletic stance with a flat back and both hands in a good position to move/punch in either direction to get that explosive jump towards the ball. Being in this position also helps with not having a false or additional step which can cause the player making a play or allowing a hit to fall in.



## Fielding a ground ball

There are many different ways to field a ground ball depending on many factors. What is the situation of the game, where are the baserunners, how many outs are there, how hard is the ball hit, and what direction was it at you. Being able to decipher all of these factors in a short period of time can prevent runners from advancing to the next base or bases.

Fielding the ball hit right at you can be fielded a couple different ways depending on the situation. No runners on base can be fielded on one knee, like an infielder, but always ready to make a strong throw to your cut man or base. Looking at the pictures below shows the positions using these two methods.



**One knee-** fielding the ball directly in the middle of the body and preventing the ball from getting past him

**Potential extra base hit** - Fielding the ball in front and ready to prevent the runner from potentially taking second if your infielders suddenly say “Runner” or “Two, Two, Two”

**Runner not Advancing on a base hit** – In good position and making sure the ball doesn’t get past him

### Ball Hit to the Right or Left

Fielding the ball hit to our right or left can be fielded many different ways and footwork is just as key as a ball hit right at us. A fielder can work on a deeper/backwards angle and come around the ball, field the ball with a backhand, or with a forehand into a spin. Working on all of these ways to field a ball will help with understanding which one you prefer to do as a player or just reacting to the ball and making the play. When fielding all of these different ways you want to work through the baseball except on the forehand to spin throw.



**Ball hit down the line or hard to our throwing hand side** - You will take a deep angle at first and will work around the ball, dip your glove hand shoulder or throwing hand shoulder to get around the ball and get your momentum moving towards your target.



**Fielding a Backhand**– A fielder will back hand the ball when he realizes he cannot get around the ball. As he is fielding the ball, he will want to plant his back leg as soon as possible to get his momentum to change direction away from the target to towards the target and square his shoulders to the base/cut man.



**Coming in on a ball – Glove Side Foot Back**

Charging a ground ball hit right at you can help keep your momentum moving towards your target but want to make sure we are fielding the ball in the correct manner to prevent slowing the momentum that we have built

up. Starting out we want to practice fielding the ball with our right foot and understand the importance of moving our left leg forward as we are squaring our shoulders and bring the ball to our throwing hand.



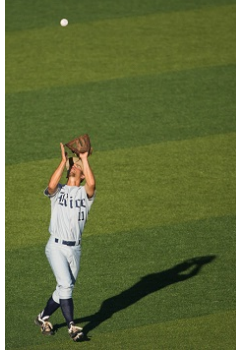
Coming in on a ball – Glove Side Foot Forward

After getting comfortable with fielding the ball that way, we want to start practicing the fielding the ball with our left foot forward. This allows us to square our shoulders and get ready to unleash a rocket of a throw as we accelerate our right foot ahead. Plant and get a throw of quicker to our target and prevent the runner from advancing or throw them out trying.



**Spin and throw** - Fielding a ground ball that is hit too hard to get around we want to take an angle that cuts the ball off. Take a look at the picture and see his foot placement. He will field the ball off of his left foot and use the momentum to plant is right foot as he spins to square his shoulders to the target and make a strong throw to the cut man or base.

## Fly Balls



Catching fly balls can be extremely difficult depending on the sun, rain, clouds, wind, field dimensions, lights, and time of day. But as outfielders, we still have to do whatever we can to catch the ball and help our pitchers and teammates out to prevent a long inning from happening. Practicing different drills to reinforce the proper mechanics will help make catching fly balls be like second nature. One thing to remember when catching the ball in the outfield. To the best of our ability, we want to catch the ball right above our eyes/head to track the ball all the way to the glove.

### Drop Step

The drop step is one of the first moves an outfield should work on when learning the position. Have a good drop step can help with getting a good jump on a ball hit over your head or just the ability to read a hardline drive. This maneuver should be done with both the left and right leg. Good drills to work on this movement is the angled over the shoulder or the star cone drill. These drills allow the outfielder to understand the importance of opening up their hips and shoulders to the direction of where the ball is heading towards.

### Getting behind the baseball

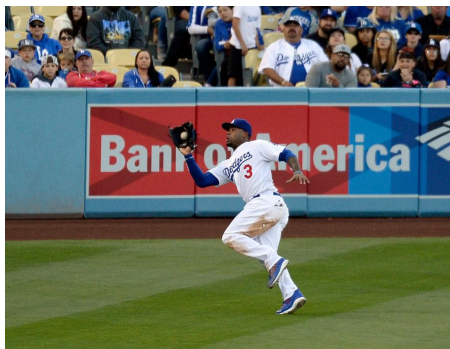
All of us that have been in baseball and played in the outfield have heard a coach tell us to get behind the baseball. Sometimes they might say it, but not explain what they mean by that and makes players frustrated since they may feel like they are doing it right. So, what does it mean to get behind the baseball?

Getting behind the baseball means to have a good judgment on a fly ball and where we will be able to catch ball with our momentum moving towards are target base. This allows us the ability to build up energy and transfer all of it into our throw. You will see in the pictures below how the outfielder is starting to move forward to where the ball will be and transition into a throwing motion towards his target.



### Catching the Ball on the Run

Most outfielders don't have the luxury that most infielders do when it comes to catch fly balls. We have to run after the ball in the gap, in front, or over our heads. The key with making sure we can catch the ball when it is anywhere in the outfield is to run with our glove down. This will help us with reaching out top speed as we run after the ball. As we get closer to the ball, we will want to extend our glove out to catch the ball. You will see in the pictures below that all the outfielders are running with their gloves down and tracking the ball all the way into their glove for the catch.



### Catches At the Wall



On deep fly balls that make it all the way to the wall. We want to make sure we use our glove or throwing hand out to help us get a sense of where the wall/fence is at. This allows us from crashing into the wall/fence and getting hurt in the process, but we also will rely on the help our fellow outfielders to help with telling us how close we are or if we have enough room. Otherwise, you may end up with a face full of fence or wall.



### Diving/Sliding Catches



Diving and sliding catches are amazing plays to see from a defensive stand point but pose high risk high reward play. The reason for saying that is the outfielder making the play is the last line of defense and most of the time the other outfielder is not in a position to back them up. If your outfielder chooses to make a diving or sliding catch, they will need to make sure they at least knock the ball down and does not go past them too far if they miss. A soft line drive or pop up that is shallow is the best balls to perform one of these risky catches.

### Dealing with the Elements

Weather is can be a tremendous adversary for an outfielder during a game. Think about the times you have had to play in the scolding heat of summer and have to deal with the sun on a fly ball. The changing of night to day and trying to find the ball when the ball blends in with the sky, or you have drizzling rain and have rain drops falling into your face or eyes. These are just a few examples of what outfielders have to deal with when it comes to catching a fly ball, but don't forget about dew on the grass.

All of these elements can make fielding in the outfield more difficult. If you know how to properly use your glove to block the sun or take short strides to prevent slipping on the grass can help the adventure of fielding easier. It is sometimes a good idea to practice in weather that isn't ideal to help prepare you for future occurrences during games.

### Communication

Communication is extremely important during the course of a game, inning, or single play. As outfielders, we can only assume what we will do once we field the ball. With the help of our teammates, we can know exactly where the ball is when we don't see a fly ball, know who is going to catch the ball, or know if we have room to catch a ball before crashing into the fence/wall. It is a good idea to work on communication at all times during practice and not be afraid to make a mistake. We all make mistakes and can learn from our communication mistakes in practice, which helps us make the correct calls during the course of the game. Plus, we don't want collisions with teammates, balls dropping in between teammates, or crashing into the wall without protecting ourselves.





To finish, outfielders are an interesting breed of athlete when it comes to defense. They have the freedom to run at top speed and make a diving catch, make a 340-foot throw to nail a guy at the plate, or leap for a ball and crashing in the wall. If you are an outfielder, play the game with a controlled reckless abandon, trust your teammates will help you from running into obstacles, and show of that big smile when a runner challenges your cannon of an arm like our fellow outfielders Jackie Bradley Jr. and Starling Marte (below).

