FUNDAMENTALS

A. Running Through First Base

1. Once the ball is hit, find where the ball is going. If the infielder has a play, run in a straight line on the foul side of the first-base line.

2. Keep focused on the first baseman to be ready to avoid a tag in case the throw is errant.

3. Run hard through first base, focusing on touching the middle- to front-third of the base with either foot. The only time a runner should slide or dive into first base is when avoiding a tag. **(picture 9-1)**

4. After touching the bag, look into foul territory in case there was a bad throw and advancing to second is possible.

5. If safe, turn into foul territory to return to first base. Never turn into the field to retreat to first base.

6. A few strides past first base, slow down to gain body control in case of a bad throw necessitating a quick change of direction. This is done by widening the feet beyond shoulders' width and taking short, choppy steps to enhance deceleration. Deceleration should never occur until past first base.

9-1

B. Rounding Bases

1. **Banana turn:** Once the ball has gone through the infield, veer into foul territory to create a better angle to advance to second base. A radius is created the shape of a banana. The bag is touched on the inside corner with either foot. Be careful not to get too wide in trying to create the angle. It should be just enough to maintain full speed and turn the corner without a wide swing to the next base. **(pictures 9-2 & 9-3)**

9-2: Foot position

9-3: Inside corner

2. **Point turn:** If the runner knows immediately that he is going to advance multiple bases, start the turn right away. This eliminates going straight up the line and then veering out, which is slower than picking a spot to cut the angle and running directly there. This holds true for all bases and is the quickest way to circle the bases.

3. After the base is touched, how far the runner advances on a turn is determined by where the ball is on the field. The farther the ball from the runner, the bigger the turn. An aggressive runner advances as far as possible toward the next base while still being able to retreat safely. The completion of a turn should be made with a shuffle breakdown to gain control while focusing on the play. The shuffle breakdown puts the baserunner in position to advance or retreat. **(picture 9-4)**


9-4: Break down position

C. Secondary Lead

1. **In leagues where leads are not permitted:** Once the ball crosses the plate, a couple of shuffles are taken toward the next base, anticipating an errant throw from the catcher. This routine will help players stay focused on the ball moving into the hitting zone, and be ready to advance on a ball in the dirt or a hit. Even though a primary lead is not allowed, it's still important for runners to go over the game situation before the ball is pitched.

DRILLS

1. **Home to First:** Line up players at home plate. One at a time, players run through first base as if they have hit a ground ball to the infield. A coach is positioned near first base looking for correct foot placement on the bag, proper breakdown and players looking to foul territory for the ball after they have touched first base. After all players perform this drill correctly, the coach can randomly throw balls into foul territory after the runners touch first base, simulating an overthrow. Players react and advance to second when they see the loose ball. **(picture 9-5)** **Recommended ages 8-12.**
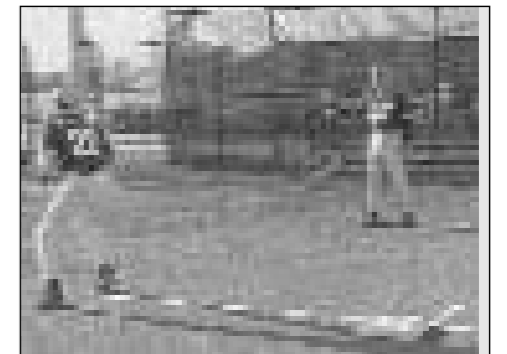
9-5: Proper breakdown

2. **Making a Turn:** Same as above, except have players run as if they have hit a single. If you have cones as in the photo, utilize them for ages 7-10. Otherwise, have one coach stand 10 feet in front of first base and 2 to 3 feet in foul territory. Have another coach stand 6 feet off first base and 2 to 4 feet behind the bag. With coaches in these two positions, have the players run around the first coach and in front of the second coach. This will help with the proper initial turn and make sure runners cut the corner correctly to get lined up toward second base. Coaches should watch to make sure base runners touch first base with either foot on the inside corner. **(picture 9-6)** **Recommended ages 7-16.**

9-6: Banana turn

3. **Turns Reading the Play**: Set a coach at an outfield position to simulate any given outcome of a fly ball, ground ball, or a thrown ball. Players start at home plate and run to first making a proper turn. Once the base is tagged, the player picks up the coach in the outfield to determine weather to try to advance to second or not. The coach is simulating different outcomes of plays. For example: coach comes up cleanly with ball in hand. Coach drops a fly ball that kicks away from him a few feet. Coach simulates ball slipping out of hand on an attempted throw back to the infield. The runner reads the coach acting as an outfielder and advances or retreats depending upon the situation. **This drill simulates game situations and gives players a chance to work on decision-making.**
Recommended ages 7-16.

4. **Balls in the Dirt:** Divide the team into three even groups. Place a group at all three bases, first, second and third. One player at each base takes a turn at the same time. Have a catcher with full gear working on receiving and blocking balls. A coach throws pitches to the catcher varying the tosses; some are good, some are in the dirt. The baserunners start from their primary lead and take their secondary lead as the coach makes the pitch. The runners are working on timing their secondary lead correctly. They are also reading the ball flight. As soon as they determine the ball will be in the dirt, they break for the next base. If the ball is caught, they utilize the crossover step and take three hard steps back to their base. Before the next pitch, runners jog to the next base and wait their turn in line there. If your league doesn't allow leads, starting position is on the base. Baserunners still read the pitch, and if it's in the dirt, they take off to the next base. If it's caught, they shuffle off the base two steps and watch the catcher throw the ball back to the pitcher. **This drill works on timing the secondary lead properly for the best jump to the next base. It teaches players to read a pitch in the dirt and to aggressively break to the next base when it is recognized.**
Recommended ages 8-16.

5. **Picking up the Coach:** Line up all players at first base. When a coach yells, *Go!* one player runs from first to third base on a presumed ball hit to right field. The correct technique in running multiple bases when the ball is hit behind the runner is as follows: If the runner is not sure whether to advance, look to the third-base coach about halfway to second base. After seeing the coach, the runner should look at second base and focus on touching the bag and turning correctly. As soon as the bag is touched, the runner should pick up the third-base coach again. The third-base coach will give different signals to the baserunner. Examples: 1.Waving runners to third or stopping them at second on the first look. 2. Waving runners to third on the first look and stopping them at second on the second look. Throw out different signs so the runner has to react to different situations. Note: Time should be taken before this drill to establish a few simple hand signals to direct the runners. During games, use verbal commands along with the hand signals. **This drill will help both the runners and the coach.**
Recommended ages 8-16.

> ## Expert Advice on Picking Up the Coach
> The "Picking Up the Coach" drill will help both the runners and the coach. It simulates game communication.

6. **Reading Fly Balls:** Divide the team into three groups and put runners at all bases, and have three players in the outfield. Place coaches at bases to monitor and critique runners. Throw or hit different fly balls to the outfielders. Throwing balls will be more accurate and effective for the drill. Runners react to the simulated hits. Players need to learn in non-tag-up situations to get as far off the base as possible, but only to the point where they can return safely if the ball is caught. Runners should stay at that distance and watch to see if the ball is caught. If it is caught, they quickly retreat to the bag to tag up and watch for an errant throw. If it is dropped, they advance to the next base. This is a common situation, and players often don't get far enough off the base and are forced out at the next base when the ball is not caught. On balls that are deep enough, players should tag up and break for the next base as soon as the ball is caught. On all definite foul balls, baserunners should always tag up and look to advance.
Recommended ages 8-12.

7. **Reading Balls at Second Base.** Put a full defense on the field and place everyone else at second base. One coach hits fungos to different locations on the infield and outfield. One coach critiques the baserunners at second base. Second base is a critical base to make good decisions. Players must learn when to break to third base on ground balls. Generally, runners can advance to third when a ball is hit to the right of second base. On balls hit to the left side of second base–in front of the baserunner–make sure the ball gets through for a hit. But that doesn't always hold true. The coach should hit balls just behind and just in front of the runners at different speeds to see how the runners react. There are no absolutes on when to advance. These situations need to be recreated in practice so runners experience when to stay and when to go. These same scenarios should be done with balls hit to the outfield as well. Have the defensive team make the plays on the hit balls as if it were a game.
Recommended ages 8-16.

GAMES

1. **Stopwatch Games:** Bring a stopwatch to practice and time your players' speed to first base, their speed on doubles, triples and inside-the-park home runs. Keep a log of the times and see which players improve their running speeds throughout the season. This will motivate them to run faster and show them the importance of making a good turn, which saves time on doubles, triples and home runs. **We find that one of the favorite things players at all age groups enjoy is knowing how fast they can run the bases. For ages 7-8 keep it simple and time them to first base and second base.**
Recommended ages 9-16.

2. **Relay Race Game:** Pick two captains and have them play rock, paper, scissors to determine who picks first. Alternating picks, captains choose players for their team. Place one team at second base and one team at home plate. The team at second starts on the base and goes third to home, while the team at home runs first to second. This is a relay race and the second player cannot start until his teammate touches the base he is running for. **Players will learn to cut the corners better and touch the base on the inside corner to save time rounding the bases. Adds excitement to practice.**
Recommended ages 10-16.

Expert Advice on Spicing up Practice

If practice is not flowing as well as you expected, and you need to inject some life into your players, set up a baserunning game and have some fun!