

Major League Baseball (11-12 year olds)

- Pitching distance 52 feet
 - Base distance 72 feet
 - Leading allowed

By JON GALLOP

Base Running

A player needs to get out of the batter's box immediately upon contact. Do not watch the ball. Even if a player thinks it is a foul ball they should run. The coach or the umpire will call you back. Don't think . . . just get out of the box. Run through the base. Do not dive, jump, or lunge. A player jumping and flopping on first base looks out on a close play as opposed to running full speed through the base.

Always anticipate a double. Put pressure on the opposition's fielders.

Base running is important because a runner should get a very good jump on each pitch, giving your team a huge advantage. The first rule is, do not get picked-off . . . ever. The only time it isn't the most ridiculous play ever is if you have the steal sign.

Once you have reached the base congratulations. Now you need to help your team by trying to score that is the object of the game.

Stand on the base, and take the signal from the third base coach. Too many players start wandering off and take the signal from the third base coach while not on the base. This is unacceptable. You, as a

runner, always need to have your eye on the ball. If you are on the base, you can never be tagged out, it is like your “free space.” If you are watching the base coach you are not watching the ball, consequently the only time you take a signal is when you are on the base. If you are not sure of the sign, you need to let your third base coach know you do not have the signal.

Once you have the sign, you step off the base with your right foot straight and then turn and slide your feet side to side never crossing over. Keep your eyes continually on the player holding the ball.

Do not take a lead until the pitcher has stepped on the pitching rubber. If you do not have the steal sign, after the pitch has been delivered you should get at least three more steps off the base. A player must watch closely the trajectory of the ball. If you note the pitcher is throwing it in the dirt, you can get an extra jump by reading “dirt.” You can get to the next base even though the ball may only be a few feet away from the catcher, because of the better read on a bad pitch when it is thrown too low and gets away from the catcher.

Once you are leading and the pitcher makes a pick-off throw to first base, you quickly return to the part of the base closest to right field as opposed to home plate. You also make sure you turn your head away and look down the right field line. This helps you avoid being hit in the face by the ball and also gives you an opportunity to see first if the ball gets past the first baseman.

When you are on the first base with a right-handed pitcher and you have been given the steal sign you should go as soon as that front foot of the pitcher moves toward home plate. It is imperative that while in the dugout you are watching the pitcher to perhaps pickup a quirk or a “tell” as to easily differentiate when the pitcher is throwing over first base and when they are delivering to the plate. Some pitchers

will bend their front knee prior to delivering to the plate or rock their body in a certain way. By carefully studying the pitcher you can gain a huge advantage. Great base runners carefully study each pitcher to gain an extra step on a jump.

In the event that the pitcher is a left-handed pitcher, be careful. A good left-hander can make a pick-off throw to first when you think they are going to home and you will get nailed. When in doubt take a shorter lead to first base if you are not stealing have your weight back toward first base(a one way lead) until you are sure the ball is delivered to home.

When a player is stealing they need to quickly break. They should not stand up immediately as if they run, but come up gradually from the leading crouch. Further, they should take their first step directly toward the base . Many players first step is not directly toward second base. To help avoid this when taking a lead the player should slightly turn their right foot toward second to assist with the jump.

When you are taking the lead on second base you can take a bigger lead make sure you are aware of the center fielder, short stop, and second baseman for trick plays. You should get a bigger jump when the pitcher delivers then from first base since it is a long pick-off throw from the catcher to second base after the pitch.

When leading on third base you also want to get a good lead remember a right hander can make a good pick-off over to third base when you think they are going to home. Make sure that when the pitch is delivered you get a good walking lead off the base. Your only worry is a line-drive it is also important if on third base you take your lead in foul territory. Taking a lead in foul territory is imperative since a line-drive or hot grounder toward you and hitting you in fair territory you will be ruled out.

Always plan to slide. A player should plan on sliding on any close play. You do not want to risk injuring another player or an umpire calling you “out” for failing to slide.

Rules to Live By

1. Never make the first or last out of an inning at third base.
2. Always tag up on a foul ball.
3. Always lead off third in foul territory.
4. Run full speed through the base—never ease up.
5. Know how many out in the inning.
6. Always tag up on third base with less than two outs on a fly ball even if you are sure it is over the fielder’s head.

Fielding

We have discussed the importance of fielding in prior chapters we need to discuss the back-hand play the problem of players this age is they do not get low enough. When fielding a backhand you cross your left foot across your right foot reaching your glove as far to the left side as you can and getting low. We call this “knee to chest.” Your chest should virtually be touching your knee. Your fingers should be spread as wide apart as possible to give your glove the maximum surface area to field the ball.

A big problem of young players with back-hands is they do not open their glove in a proper way to allow the ball into the glove easily. Once you have fielded the back-hand, you need to plant your right foot (if

right-handed) for a strong throw to first base.

When fielding normally (non-backhanded), the palm of their hand should be facing down. When fielding the ball it is important the glove be a ramp--not too flat or not too straight up.

A good drill is to have player's field balls with their glove only to make sure the ball is going easily into the glove it is important to have soft hands. The fielder should not lock their elbows when fielding having some give to their arm reduces the energy from the force of the baseball to prevent it from popping out. The fielder's feet should be apart when fielding the ball, with the left foot slightly ahead of the right foot (if right-handed), by approximately 4 to 6 inches. A quick release is more important than ever because of the increased speed of the runners. It is rare that a fielder gets "too low" to field. Make sure the back is bent and the glove is to the ground and out in front of the body. Make sure the player has centered their body to field a ball.