



Berlin Youth Baseball – Outfield Defense

Goal of this document: This document should give coaches and parents guidance on how to teach youth players to field in the outfield.

Outfield is often a spot in youth baseball where all players of any skill level can be placed. One of the most challenging things for outfielders, especially for young players, is having patience since often at the young age balls are rarely hit to the outfield. To be successful in the outfield, you have to teach youth how to pay attention to the game and be able to spring into action as soon as the ball comes their way. Often, at a young youth level, when a ball is hit to the outfield it is a big deal and can mean extra bases, runs scored, and even an in-the-ball-park homerun so have those players that can find the ball, retrieve it, and throw it in is important.

Tennis Balls bare-hand solo: Learning fly balls, especially with very young players, can actually be dangerous. As a coach, you don't want to take a hardball and start hitting flyballs from home plate to your players as odds are one could miss and get injured. Instead, start small and safer by using tennis balls. First give each youth their own tennis ball and work on bare hand toss the ball up and catch it. Challenge your youth at you do this together in a group to get as many times as possible in a row at a certain height. Then have them try a little higher. Then have them try to catch it with only 1-hand, their GLOVE hand (but with no glove, just bare-handed).

Tennis Balls bare-hand Rapid Fire: You can increase the difficulty on this tennis ball challenge while still keeping it safe by getting the boys in line and having the coach toss the popups instead. Give the coach a bucket of tennis balls, have the first player in line be their turn, and toss a popup up in the air. As soon as the youth is about to catch that ball, toss a 2nd ball in the air. When the youth catches it gently roll it in the direction of the coach. The coach keeps tossing another tennis ball as soon as the previous ball thrown is about to be caught. The other boys in line can help by picking up any balls that are missed. Make it a competition and see who can catch the most out of 20 balls for example. Make it challenging by required one-handed, glove-hand catch.

Tennis Ball one-hops: Remember that outfield is not just about flyballs, another common hit is the hard liner, many times a one-hopper that lands just in the front or to the side of the outfielder. You can use the tennis balls again (this works best on a hard floor like a gym for bounce), get the boys in line, and throw them one-hoppers either to the left, right, or right at them that they must field bare-handed and make sure to re-enforce the "First step back" pivot.

Flyball catch trainer: A fun drill the youth will enjoy that is safe and greatly improves focus and hand-eye coordination is getting a catch trainer stick. The idea is to get the boys in line, and one at a time the coach tosses the catch trainer up to the boy in line and yells out a color. The youth should try to catch the stick bare-handed by grabbing onto the color that was called out.



Now we can transition to having the youth get a glove and use the more standard baseballs. The **“Find the ball” Popups drill** from the Fundamentals clinic is a good place to start. The player can work on getting their glove under the ball, getting the glove above their head, getting the extra hand up by the glove, and securing the ball in the glove with the second hand. One common mistake young players make is only using one hand, so make sure to re-enforce that you want to see both hands up above the



head. Another common is putting the glove directly in front of their face. The glove should actually be just slightly to the glove side of the face so that the youth it not blocking their own line of sight to the ball. Another common mistake is dropping their glove down below their head, or to their side, or out in front right when it's time to catch the ball, so make sure to re-enforce that the glove stays up above the head and that is where the ball should be caught to. Also make sure the glove stays facing up and never drops like a “basket”.

“First Step Back” pivot drill: One drill you have start new young outfielders with is this first step back pivot drill. One important thing to teach every young player, when the ball is hit to them in the outfield, their first step should always be backwards. This will give them extra time if it's over their head, but also give them an extra precious second in case it's a one-hop or hard hit at an angle. Place a bat on the ground (or straight line) in front of the youth's feet. The youth should never touch or cross over this line (“false steps”). Then toss a soft popup over their left shoulder (youth pivots on their right foot and steps their left foot back at an angle to run and get it). Reset and toss over the right shoulder (pivots on left foot and steps right foot back to run to get it). One common mistake is youth backpedaling with both feet at the same time, so remind them that is clumsy and will cause them to fall, and instead they should always pivot and look over their shoulder.



Cutoffs for Outfielders: While this clinic is about outfielders, it is important to teach outfielders what a cutoff is and how to use it. At all younger ages of youth baseball, it is recommended that outfielders ALWAYS throw to the cutoff, regardless of how short or far the ball was hit. This method ensure that the shorter the throws, the more likely they are to succeed. But this method also requires having middle infielders/cutoff (2B/SS) that know where to go and how to cutoff the ball. As the youth get older, you can teach the outfielders and cutoff more advanced selective use of the cutoff, e.g. if it's a close play from a close distance the cutoff may get skipped, but in a long extra base situation you may even need a double-cutoff/relay. To practice the cutoff process, setup a full outfielder of youth players and have the middle infielders in at 2B and SS (the middle infielders can even just be coaches if you have some). Then the coach stands around pitcher's mound and throws fly balls or base hits to each outfielder. If the ball is hit to the left side of the outfield, the SS comes out and cuts off the ball and relays to second base. If the ball is hit to the right side of the outfield, the 2B cuts off and relays to the SS at second base.

The 3 "B"s for Outfielders: Remind the youth of the 3 "B"s (ball – base – backup) learned in the Defensive Awareness clinic. In outfield, you can eliminate the "base" since there are none, thus it's the 2 "B"s (ball – backup). If the ball is hit to you, get it, if not then back somebody up. The biggest mistake youth outfielders make which can negatively impact the team's chances of preventing runs from scoring is just standing there and doing nothing if a ball isn't hit to them. Instead, it's critical to get all outfielders to actively move and run on every single play. If the ball is hit to you, get it, but if it's not hit to you then back somebody up. The most common backup situation, yet probably the most poorly done by most players, is if the ball is hit to the outfielder right next to you, you should run at an angle behind them in case they miss it, and become their backup (Example: ball hit to Left Center, the Left Fielder and Center fielder should both back him up). That way, if the ball goes under the glove of the outfielder, there is another outfielder right there to pick it up. If the ball is not hit near you in the outfield, then you should be backing up a base (Example: Left Fielder backs up 3B, Right Fielder backs up 1B, and the Left Center/Right Center fielders can backup 2B). That way if the ball is over thrown to a base, there is somebody there to pick the ball up and prevent runners from advancing. You can practice this by setting up a full outfield, and having at a minimum middle infielders (2B, SS). Then as coach from around the pitchers mound you throw either a fly ball or base hit near any outfielder. The outfielder's goal is to retrieve it, throw to the cutoff, and into 2B each time, who returns the ball to coach. The coach should be watching all 4 outfielders each time to see that they either 1.) fielded the ball or 2.) moved to the proper backup position.