

Developing Outfielders: Drills & Principles

Too many times we as coaches think we have to hit fly balls with a bat to our outfielders for every practice. Some problems arise when we consistently attempt this feat: an inability to hit a good fly ball, fly balls that don't challenge our players, and a lot of "standing around" waiting for a fly ball to be hit.

Eventually we (coaches) have to hit fly balls to our players in order for them to practice reading the ball off the bat, but the following drills will give players more repetition and a "feel" of getting under a fly ball. These drills can be done at any level and are always a lot of fun.

Quarterback Drill

Outfielder is 10 feet away from the coach with both feet pointing toward the coach. The coach uses the words "drop step and go" and points in the direction to where he wants his player to drop step and go.

As soon as the outfielder hears the coach's command the player uses the drop step and cross over in order to turn his body and sprint in the direction to where the coach has pointed. If the coach points to the player's right – the player will drop step with his right foot and cross over with his left. If the coach points to the player's left – the outfielder will drop step with his left and cross over with his right.

Once the player has sprinted approximately 20-40 yards (depending on skill and age) the coach will throw a high fly ball, and the outfielder who is sprinting must try to get under the ball in order to make the catch on the run. Once players get comfortable with the drill and make several catches you can increase the difficulty by throwing the ball further in order to make outfielders run harder and possibly make a diving catch.

To make the drill easier and work the players harder, have each player line up with a ball in their glove. When it is their turn they will toss you the ball and wait for your command. Once they have caught the ball they will jog back to the line up with the ball in their glove.

Tennis Racquet Fly Balls

Using a tennis racquet and tennis balls, hit fly balls to your outfielders but add a communication element to the drill. Have half of your outfielders line up in center and the other half in right (or left field). Hit tennis balls with the racquet in places where the two outfielders will have to communicate in order to catch the ball. Hit balls that are over their shoulder and in front of them.

This drill also works well if you add your middle infield and work on communication with the outfielders and infielders on fly balls that are hit softly between the outfield and infield.

Fly Ball Principles

- Never "back peddle" to catch a ball that is hit over your shoulder. Always use the drop step and run!
- Once the fly ball is descending the ball must be called by one of the defensive players.
- On balls that are hit softly between the outfield and infield, the outfield has priority. Therefore the infield should go after the ball and try to make the catch until the outfielder calls the infielder off. This method will avoid the ugly collision between the outfield and infield.
- The outfielder always has priority over the infielder on fly balls.

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