

RELAY DRILLS

Relay Lines (Basic):

Separate the players into groups of three. For each group, position the players in a line approximately the length of a base path apart (i.e., if your team plays on a 50/70 field, the players should be 70' apart). Starting at one end, have the kids play catch, focusing on good relay mechanics. The relay (middle) position should provide a good target, positioned with both hands in the air. The player receiving the relay should concentrate on moving toward the ball, receiving it on the glove side, turning to the glove side and making a throw to the other end of the relay line. Do this continually back and forth for a few reps then have the lines rotate so each player has an opportunity at the relay position.

Relay Drill with Positioning (Intermediate):

Break the team into three groups. Queue one group in right field, one group at shortstop and one group at third base. (This setup can be moved to mimic any outfield throw; e.g., right field, first base and home plate for a throw home.) Coach hits a ball to right field, the third baseman calls for the throw to third and he directs the shortstop to the relay position by yelling "left, right, in, out, etc."). The goal is to position the defenders in a straight line by the time the hit is fielded. When the throw is made, the third baseman then calls "relay" for a throw that needs to be redirected or "go" for a throw that will reach the base on a fly or on one long bounce.

Relay Drill with Baserunner (Advanced):

Starting with a similar setup as the Relay Drill with

Positioning, add a baserunner. This will work for balls on the ground (runner tries to advance two bases) and balls in the air (runner tries to advance one base). Coach hits a ball to the outfield, the runner advances (tagging on a fly ball if appropriate) and the defense tries to throw him out at the advance base.

Relay Drills (Expert):

To further mimic game situations coaches can field an entire defense and utilize multiple baserunners. For an expert level drill, hit the ball into play and have the catcher call the appropriate play for the defense to execute (with or without baserunners).

Relay Drill with Positioning and Relay Drill with Baserunner can be expanded for additional challenge by ending each try with additional throws around the field (i.e., coach or catcher calls for a back-pick (e.g., "cut two" to redirect a throw to second). This can be done with or without live runners.

Additionally, Relay Drill with Positioning and Relay Drill with Baserunner can also be expanded to include double cut situations for balls hit in the outfield gaps or corners. When executing double cuts, a pair of infielders run to the cut position (approximately 15' apart) and the remaining infielders vacate first base to cover second and third. The fielder covering lines up the lead cut position (further from the base) while the trail cut aligns himself. The outfielder throws to the lead; the secondary cut is only there to backup and a

throw that misses the lead cut. The lead cut should not throw the ball to the trail cut.

When running a double cut, the first and second basemen run the cut positions for balls down the right field line. The shortstop and second basemen run the cut positions for all other extra base hits.

This is among the most complicated defensive plays to learn. Fielders must first understand the basics of relay throws. Without that, there is not enough time to direct them to positions during a live play. Teaching this should be reserved for teams on a 60/90 field.

RIGHT OF WAY

Right of Way (Intermediate):

Position the entire team in the field. If there are more than 9 players, double up at positions. Coach hits fly balls to random positions and player work on calling and catching the ball. Where there are multiple players at a position, they alternate tries. Fielders work on understanding the right of way. Outfielders have right of way over infielders and players in the middle of the field have right of way over players on the perimeter of the field. For clarity, the centerfielder can call off everyone. Pitchers and catchers have right of way over no one. Begin the drill with balls directly at player so they get comfortable calling for the ball then move to balls hit between players forcing them to make decisions and acknowledge right of way.

INFIELD/OUTFIELD DRILL

Infield/Outfield Drill (Advanced):

Every professional coach runs a variation of this drill; this is a simplified version. To further simplify the drill, eliminate the outfield portion.

Position players everywhere but the pitcher's position. Working from left field to right field, coach hits four rounds of ground balls to the outfielders:

1. Relay throw to second base
2. Relay throw to third base
3. Relay throw to home
4. Shallow grounder, outfielder charges and makes a "do or die" throw to home (no relay)

For each try, the infielders move to the appropriate relay and cover positions. After the outfield throws are complete, the outfielders gather together in centerfield and a coach hits fly balls while the infield completes the second half of the drill.

Infielders start by throwing a ball around the infield (home to third to second to shortstop to first to home). After a few trips around the infield, the players move to their positions. For all ground ball rounds, coach works across the infield from third to first:

1. Groundball, throw home
2. Groundball, throw to first base
3. Coach drops a ball in fair territory and catcher throws to first
4. Groundball, throw to second, turn double play
5. Coach drops a ball in fair territory, catcher

- throws to second, turn double play
6. Groundball, throw to first
7. Coach drops a ball in foul territory and catcher throws to first
8. Fielders get two consecutive tries in the last round. Groundball, throw home then coach immediately rolls a ball to the fielder, he charges, fields and throws to first. For the first baseman's last round, he throws home, then charges, fields and throws to third. The third baseman then throws the last ball to the catcher.
9. The drill ends with a pop up to the catcher.

SLIDING

Sliding (Intermediate):

Queue the players halfway between first and second bases. One at a time, players sprint to second base and slide (this can be done head-first or feet-first depending upon the skill being taught). If the players are having difficulty identifying where to start the slide, coaches can mark the general vicinity with a glove, cone, etc.

For feet-first sliding, focus players on a fully-extended lead leg with the off leg tucked underneath (i.e., left ankle behind the right knee) and the hands away from the body (either to the side or up in the air). To illustrate the proper position, have players sit on the ground, "make the number four" with their legs and extend their arms up and away from their bodies.

SLIDING (CONT.)

For head-first sliding, focus on arms extended with the player landing on his chest when he hits the ground. The most important thing for all slides is that hands and spikes do not get trapped under the player's body, as that is where injuries occur.

Leading and Stealing (Advanced):

Station groups of one to four players on the right field line (with one of the runners on first base) and a coach on the mound. Runners take a lead, coach spins for a pick off or throws a pitch home. Baserunners read the coach's delivery and steal second or dive back to first. Stealing players run all the way to second base and complete the drill with a proper slide.

DIVING

Dive Drill (Intermediate):

Queue the players in a line about 15' away from the coach. Players start in ready position and the coach, positioned on one knee, throws balls low to the ground to the player's forehand side. The ball should be thrown no higher than a player's waist and it should be far enough away that the player must dive to catch it. Players need to focus on starting low, staying low, diving with their arms out and landing on their chest. This will teach proper ready position, good reaction times and proper technique for diving and head-first sliding. Begin the drill with tries to the forehand side, then move to backhand tries. When the players become adept, randomize the throws to both forehand and backhand side.