

Outfield: Fly Balls

- **Jump**

When the ball is hit, get a good jump. A good jump depends on your reaction time, which can improve through repetition. Watch the ball all the way to the plate; both the location of the pitch and your knowledge of a particular hitter helps you anticipate where the ball may go and give you a chance for a better jump.

- **Footwork**

It's difficult if not impossible to get a good jump without good footwork.

When the ball is hit to your side, your first move will be a crossover step.

When the ball is hit over your head to the side your first step will be a drop step, followed by a crossover.

If you overrun the ball you can stop and take an inside step back to the direction you came from. You should face the ball as you change directions.

When the ball is hit directly over your head, your first step will be a deep drop step with your throwing hand side.

The reason to drop with your throwing hand is if you need to switch sides as your running back on the ball it's much easier to switch from your throwing hand side to your glove hand side and make the catch then the other way around.

One of the most difficult fly balls to judge is the ball hit directly at you. If you don't immediately recognize whether the ball is going over your head or going to drop in front of you, freeze. The worst thing you can do is guess. Simply freeze, try to determine where the ball is and listen. The other outfielder may be able to see the trajectory better than you and yell at you to go in or go back.

- **Run Hard**

Once you have determined approximately where the ball is going to land, start running hard to that spot. This will give you time to make adjustments if you misjudged the ball. If you coast toward the ball and you find out the ball is going to land farther away than anticipated, you may not have time to get to that spot.

- **Don't Run On Your Heels**

If you run on your heels toward a fly ball, you will notice that the ball is bouncing. This often happens when you coast toward the ball. Run hard and try to keep more on the front part of your feet and the ball will stay steady in your vision.

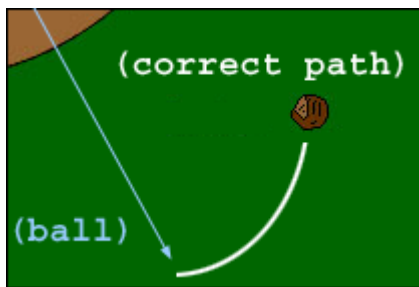
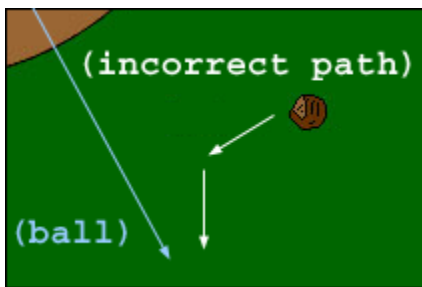
- **Get Behind The Ball**

You will dramatically improve your velocity and the time required to throw the ball if you get behind the ball as it comes down and start moving in the direction of your target as you catch the ball.



- **Circle The Ball**

Sometimes you have to sprint as fast as you can just to have an opportunity to catch a ball. Other times the ball will be hit high enough that you will have extra time to get yourself in a good position to get behind the ball. One technique that will help you get in position is to circle the ball. With a ball hit to your side it's risky to try and take a direct angle to cut it off. If you miss judge the distance and speed at all, the ball may get by you. By taking an angle that is deeper you can circle behind the ball and catch it moving forward with the ball in front of you. While it might take slightly longer to get to the ball, you will be in a better position to not only catch it but make an accurate throw. The diagrams below show the incorrect angle and proper angle to take when running to the ball.



- **Turn Your Back**

When dropping back on a ball hit directly over your head, it's important that you drop to your throwing hand side. If you drop straight back on your glove hand side, turning your back on a ball on the other side will require you to make a backhanded catch. This is a more difficult play. By dropping back on your throwing hand side, you are in position to turn your back quickly to the ball if it's curving toward the line. This is common for a right-handed right fielder or a left-handed left fielder. The turn should be made as quickly as possible.

Although it's a skill that isn't used very often it is one that takes a lot of practice to become good at. Of course a spectacular catch might be your reward.



- **Inside Turn**

The inside turn is used when you are going after a fly ball at an angle and you need to change directions. You will plant and push off with your outside leg and open up with your trailing leg in order to change directions. The advantage to the inside turn is that you can keep your eye on the ball the entire time.



- **Playing the Fly Ball in the Sun**

One of the most difficult plays in baseball is the fly ball or line drive that is hit directly into the sun.

- **The Jump**

It's important to get a good jump on the ball and quickly anticipate where you think it will land. Often the ball is lost soon after being hit, which means your first analysis of where the ball is going to land is essential.

- **Listen**

Once you have lost the ball in the sun, continue in the direction of where you believe it will land. Listen for other outfielders to tell you if you're going in the wrong direction.

- **Shielding Your Eyes**

When you turn to find the ball, either while running or after reaching the spot you think it will land, use your glove to shield the sun from your eyes. It's important that you don't stare into the sun directly. If running at an angle that makes it difficult to get the glove up, use your throwing hand to shield the sun.

- **Fly Ball Above the Sun**

As you run, if the ball is above the sun, shield your eyes by looking over the top of your glove towards the ball.

- **Fly Ball in the Sun**

Once the ball has dropped into the sun, switch to shielding your eyes with the bottom of your glove. You will be looking under your glove for the ball to drop out of the sun. Many players make the mistake of continuing to look over the top of the glove for the ball. This is incorrect since the ball, as it is coming down, will be visible first below the glove. If you look over the top of the glove, you may never see it.

Outfield: Backing Up

One of the best ways to keep yourself in the game and to help your team is to back up on every play when the ball is not hit to you. By backing up you can keep a runner or runners from advancing on an errant throw.

Here are a couple examples to give you an idea:

Position - Right Field

- Situation: Runner on First, batter bunts the ball, ball is fielded and an errant throw is made to first. If you are backing up first on the play, you may be able to keep the runner from going to third and you most likely will keep the batter on first.

Position - Center Field

- Situation: Runner on First, ball is hit back to the pitcher, Ball is fielded and an errant throw is made to second. If you don't move, the runner will easily make it to third. If you are backing, the runner will most likely have to stay at second.

Position - Left Field

- Situation: Runner on first, double play ball hit to the first baseman, first baseman overthrows the shortstop. If you are backing up second you will probably keep the lead runner from advancing to third base. If not, it's an easy extra base and maybe a run.
- Situation: Runner on second, batter bunts the ball, ball is fielded by the pitcher who makes an errant throw trying to get the runner going to third. If you are backing up the play, you may keep the runner from advancing, saving a run, and the batter from going to second.

As the above examples illustrate, backing up can prevent a bad situation from getting worse.

- **Coaching Advice**

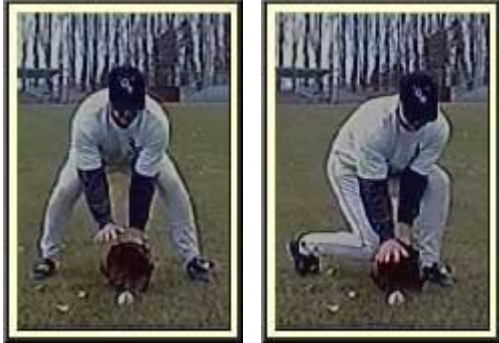
Another benefit of backing up should be mentioned. By backing up on every play you will not only show your coach, but every player on the team the type of hustle and work ethic you have. Two attributes no leader can be without.

Outfield: Ground Balls

- **Approach**

How you field a ground ball will often be dictated by the situation and where you are in relation to the ball.

With nobody on base, and the ball hit near you, your goal is to make sure you keep the ball in front of you and field it cleanly to keep the base runner from advancing to second. You will in this situation want to field the ball like an infielder.



With a runner at second and the ball hit sharply to you, you may determine you have a chance to throw the runner out at home. In this case you will want to field the ball off your glove hand side.

- **Charging**

The speed at which you charge the ground ball will also be determined by the situation. If you have time to field it like an infielder you will want to approach the ball under control and get yourself in position to catch it. Even if the situation dictates that you rush to get the ball you will need to break down and get under control before you get to the ball. This will allow you to set yourself up to make a good throw which will more than make up for the time you used in slowing down.

Other problems with charging the ball at full speed are difficulties in timing your approach to catch the ball on a big hop and being able to handle a bad hop.

- **Circle The Ball**

If you have time, make sure you try to circle the ball and keep it in front of you. With a ball hit to your side it's risky to try and take a direct angle to cut it off. If you miss judge the speed at all, the ball may get by you. By taking an angle that is deeper, you can circle behind the ball and catch it moving forward with the ball in front of you. While it might take slightly longer to get to the ball, you will be in a better position to not only catch it but make an accurate throw.

- **Backhand And Forehand**

Even with the goal of trying to circle and get in front of the ball, there will be times when you will need to catch a grounder going hard to each side. Practice catching ground balls both on your forehand side and backhand side. When catching these ground balls try to keep low to the ground and your glove near the ground. Remember it's easier to raise your glove to the ball than it is to drop your glove to the ball.



Outfield: Throwing

For an outfielder, the ability to make a long accurate throw is an important skill. More importantly it's a skill that can be improved and learned. After learning how to throw properly and working on that skill, my ability to throw the ball well became one of the skills that I was most proud of.

In the outfield you want to get the ball in quickly to prevent a runner from advancing. Players should know they can always improve their ability to throw the ball well. Hopefully you will give it the attention necessary to develop it into one of your most prized baseball skills.

- **Youth Coaching Advice**

If your players can throw and catch, don't assume that means they know how to throw and catch. In the outfield, incorrect grip and throwing mechanics will lead to balls being thrown all over the place. Throwing should be worked on every year.

- **Hitting The Cutoff**

Many coaches continually yell out to the outfield during the game, "Hit the cutoff man", "Make sure you hit the cutoff", "Why didn't you hit the cutoff?". But, unless you practice plays which require a decision to be made during practice, your outfielders may not really understand why it's important. During practice don't always have the ball go through to the base. Have your players use "Cut" followed by a different base.

When working on hitting the cutoff man in practice. Don't overlook the positioning of the cutoff.

Infielders need to be taught to be aware of the arm strength and position on the field of the outfielder making the throw. You want your cutoff man, if necessary, to make a short accurate throw. They shouldn't be cutting the distance in half. They should be trying to maximize the arm of the outfielders.

Remember this is two sided. If the cutoff person errors on the side of being too far away from the outfielder, the outfielder must recognize his limitations and throw the ball on one hop to the cutoff person.

- **Player Tip**

There is no quicker way to a negative reaction from a coach then to miss the cutoff man.. Always aim low. If the cutoff man is too far away and you think you need to throw it real high to get it there, aim low instead.

A nice long one hop bounce will be easy for him to field and will get there quicker than trying to get it there in the air. It will also save you from a dugout discussion about the importance of hitting the cutoff man.

- **Crow Hop**

The purpose of the crow hop is to put you in a throwing position quickly after fielding a ball, with the added benefit of giving you some momentum toward your target.

You should only use the crow hop when:

- You know where you are throwing the ball.
- You need to get the ball in quickly to either throw a runner out or to keep a runner from advancing.
- You are fielding the ball in front of you.

- You are moving in the direction that you want to throw. See Circle the Ball in [the Fly Ball and Ground Ball section](#)

Below are two progressive images of a crow hop being used on a fly ball and ground ball. Study the images and then we'll discuss the steps involved.



- **Crow Hop - Approach**

It's important that you are moving in the direction that you want to throw when fielding the ball. The crow hop is used to put you in a throwing position along the same path that you are moving. It is not useful in changing your direction.

The crow hop is a controlled move. Meaning you can't be running full speed and perform it. On a fly ball if you have time to get behind the ball and move forward in a controlled way as you catch it, you are in a good position to use the crow hop. If you are catching the ball on a sprint, running to the side, or backing up, you're not in a position to use the crow hop. The same applies to a ground ball. The difference in the ground ball, is that you don't have to wait for it to come down. You can sprint hard towards it. This adds the need to break down as you approach the ball. Breaking down is the process of changing from a full sprint to a controlled speed in which you can field the ball. It's more than just slowing down, it involves timing the bounce of the ball and your feet position. Remember you want to field the ground ball off your glove hand side with that foot forward. Breaking down puts you in that position as you continue forward.

You'll notice in the photographs above that the glove side foot is forward when catching the ball. After catching the ball trailing leg will initiate the crow hop. This is done by kicking it up and forward passing in front of the other leg. Turn your foot as you bring it forward to be perpendicular to the target. At that same time you want to point your lead shoulder and lead hip towards the target. The combination of these actions will align your body for the throw.

- **Crow Hop - Result**

As you land you will now be in a position to throw the ball. Simply continue the motion by stepping forward and making the throw. From catching the ball to the follow through on your throw, the entire action should be one continuous smooth motion.

- **Player Tip**

The crow hop is a controlled move that requires good balance. It is used to put you in a good position to throw the ball. Don't rush it! If you try and get through the crow hop too quickly, your arm will not be in a position to follow your body and make a good throw. You have to transfer the ball from your glove to your hand, get a good grip, and drop it down to begin your throwing motion. This takes time. The resulting throw of making that transfer correctly will more than make up for any lost time.

I usually only recommend the Crow Hop on plays that require the outfielder to throw out a runner at Home, late in the game. The age of the player and the quality of the outfield grass plays a big part in my philosophy.

- **Teaching The Crow Hop**

Have the player perform each step and hold.

1. Have player stand still with glove side foot forward, ball in glove. (like they just made the catch)
2. Have them move their back leg forward (no hop yet), moving the foot high and in front of the other leg, planting it perpendicular to the target.
3. The other foot is now behind. Have them pick up that foot and bring the knee up about belt high with the shoulder pointed towards the target.
4. Now have them step and throw

As they become comfortable with the movement reduce the hold period until it is one natural movement.

- **Shuffle**

There are many times when you can't get yourself set up to use a crow hop. So how do you gain momentum to make a long throw? The answer is a shuffle of the feet. It's very similar to the type of shuffle you would use when leading off a base. The difference is that on the last shuffle before throwing the ball you will cross your back leg behind your front leg, plant it, push off and throw.

Below is a shuffle being performed from right to left. The fielder has just backhanded a ground ball and has planted his right leg. He's too deep in the outfield to be able to just step and throw. So to gain momentum towards his target, he is going to shuffle towards the target and then throw.

Steps:

1. Ball is fielded and player has slowed down and planted his back leg.
2. Step forward with front leg toward the target. Keep shoulder closed.
3. Plant front leg and start to bring back leg forward. You're gaining momentum.

4. Cross back leg behind front leg. This is similar to the hop in the crow hop, but since you're body is already lined up towards the target, it's much easier to cross your leg behind. This also keeps your front shoulder and hip closed, ready to throw.
5. Plant your back leg, stride with your front leg, and throw the ball.



- **Use Anytime**

The example above was on a ball that was backhanded, but the shuffle can be used on any play. Some players prefer this method to the crow hop and use it even when they could have used a crow hop. Personally, I find I can get more on the ball using the crow hop, but the shuffle throw is still a necessary skill that you will use on a regular basis.

- **Arm Strength**

There's no substitute for throwing a baseball. Often players ask what they can do to improve their arm strength. While there are some great resources for weight lifting and other conditioning exercises that can help, I believe long toss is the single most beneficial thing you can do to gain arm strength.

- **Player Tip**

Some keys to throwing accurately from the outfield include:

- Always use a full arm motion, don't use a short throwing motion like an infielder or catcher.
- Always grip the ball across the seams. Improper grip on the ball can cause it to tail and or dip when you throw.
- Throw overhand not three-quarter or from the side. Throwing the ball overhand with the proper grip will allow you to throw the ball on a line.

Outfield: Defensive Fly Ball Communication

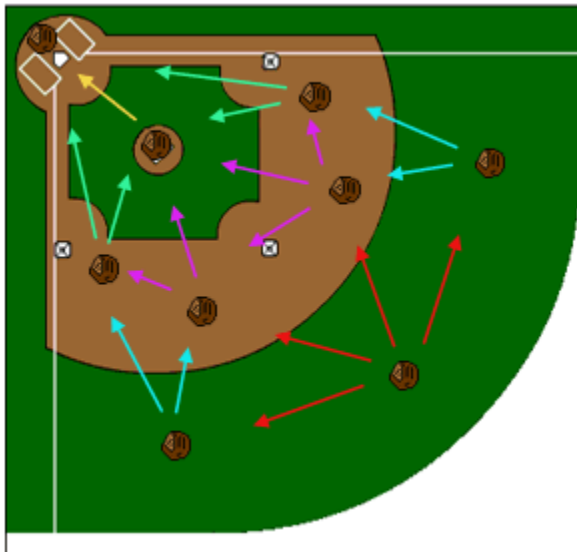
- **Who's In Charge? - Teaching Fly Ball and Pop-up Fielding Priority**

A fly ball is hit to left-center, who calls for it? How do the two players determine who has priority? This situation can occur in many places on the field involving any position on the field and can sometimes result in a collision or more often having two players looking at each other as the ball drops to the ground between them. A more difficult situation is a ball hit over the shortstop or second baseman's head. Now you could have 3 players involved. How about a pop-up to the infield around the mound? Maybe 3 or 4 players could make the play. Getting your team prepared for these situations is something you can work on in practice, but first you need to have a communication system in place.

In order to prevent confusion in these situations it's important to teach your team:

1. Which positions are in charge and able to call off other players. (Priority)
2. Different set of commands for the player who's in charge and those who aren't. (Commands)
3. Confirmation call from the player not making the play. (Confirmation)

1. Priority



The priorities for a fly ball start with the center fielder having complete control over everyone on the field and then moving in. The basic premise is to have the player moving in on the fly ball have control and the ability to call off the other player. If you look at the diagram below you'll see the arrow pointing from each player to the other players that he can call off. All outfielders have the ability to call off all infielders. The shortstop has the ability to call off all other infielders but not outfielders. If he is moving back into the outfield then he has to give up priority to the outfielder coming in on the ball. All infielders have the ability to call off the pitcher*.

- **Coaching Advice**

In higher levels of baseball you'll see where coaches don't want the pitcher to try and catch any fly balls if an infielder can get to it. This makes sense on a towering pop-up with a pitcher that hasn't been practicing catching fly balls. Let the better fielding infielder make the play.

In youth baseball you don't want to be this strict as infield pop-ups are not always high enough or the infielders quick enough to call off the pitcher. In addition, many times in youth baseball the pitcher tends to be one of the better athletes and the player you would want to catch the ball. So instruct your infielders to only call off the pitcher if the pitcher is going back. Don't call him off if it's an easy play for him coming forward.

One reason to give them is that it's easy to trip over the mound if you're running in from an infield position to catch a pop-up in front of the mound.

Following up on the coaching advise above, you'll notice in the diagram that I have the pitcher being able to call off the catcher. This really is an age/skill thing. In higher levels of baseball the pitcher will rarely catch a pop fly, but for younger players the reality is that the pitcher will often have a much better chance than the catcher to catch any pop fly hit in front of him. It's a difficult skill for the catcher to learn to catch a fly ball out in front of the plate, so until you know you have a catcher that can do it, I would give the pitcher priority.

2. Commands

Having each player yelling "I got it" doesn't really help determine who has priority when there is more than one fielder who can catch the ball. To reduce that confusion you can teach the players who have priority to use a different call. I use "**Get out**" for the fielder who has priority. So if a ball is hit into shallow left field, the shortstop going back on the ball would yell, "I got it". The left fielder coming in would have priority and would yell, "**Get out**". Anyone who has called for the ball and hears "**Get out**" should immediately give way to the other fielder.

3. Confirmation

Another useful call is to confirm to the other fielder that he has it. So, using the same example the shortstop is going back on the ball and calls "I got it". As he is getting close to the ball he hears the center fielder running hard towards him. His natural reaction will be to worry about the center fielder running into him. He may catch the ball or he may slow down and have it drop behind. The chance of this happening can be reduced if the center fielder can give a call to confirm that the shortstop is the one who is going to catch the ball. We do this by having the other fielder confirm with "**You, you, you**". When a player that has yelled "I got it" or "Get out", hears "**You, you, you**" from the other player, he can be confident in making the play.