

# BASERUNNING TECHNIQUE & DRILLS

## FASTPITCH SOFTBALL

Rhonda Revelle, Head Coach at the University of Nebraska, says that base running instruction tends to be neglected, especially at the high school level. When taught effectively, good baserunning can become instinctive, and yes, faster runners have an advantage, but players with average speed can become excellent base runners.

Whether you're coaching a college team or a high school junior varsity, the drills to build these skills are the same.

### The Basics

**Run through the base drill**- Start with either a soft toss, a tee, or a machine at home plate. A coach should be at 1<sup>st</sup> base.

1. The runner will take the shortest path to 1<sup>st</sup> after contact with the ball.
2. Half way down the base line, the coach will tell the runner to "run through" repeatedly.
3. Make sure the runner touches the bag properly and runs through the bag.
4. The runner should break down by chopping her feet and dropping her hips at about 6ft through the base. The runner should always turn toward the baseline (right) after the break down.

Note: This drill can be timed by stopwatch and each runner recorded.

**Turn and Look- Go to 2<sup>nd</sup>**- This is the next step in teaching the runner to take an extra base.

1. Halfway down the base line, the coach will tell the runner to "turn and look" repeatedly.
2. Make sure the runner hits the front inside corner of the bag and turns down the line towards 2<sup>nd</sup>.
3. The runner should break down towards where the ball is being fielded (left, center, or right). The break down should be a good athletic position with the feet shoulder width apart and the hips dropped. (Similar to a linebacker in football)
4. The next step in this drill is to tell the runner to "go to 2<sup>nd</sup>".

Note: Always stop a drill to point out when a player is making an error. You can have the runner slide at 2<sup>nd</sup> to add another drill. You can also send the runner to 3<sup>rd</sup> or home.

**Base starts** – Put a runner on 1<sup>st</sup> with pitcher and catcher at their positions. This drill is to make sure that players are off the base as soon as the ball leaves the pitcher's hand.

1. Stance- The runner should have one foot in contact with the base with step foot in back or use the contact foot from the front of the base as the step foot. The runner should be in a standing sprinter's start position and looking in at the pitcher.

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2. There are two ways to teach this technique. Have the runner step with the pitcher when she steps or step when the pitcher is half-way down her backswing.
3. When running this drill, have the runners steal, lead-off, and lead-off and go to the next base. When leading-off, the runner should break down after the step or steps depending on the situation.

**Tag up-** Put a runner on 3<sup>rd</sup> with pitcher and catcher at their positions. The pitcher will pitch to a coach standing in the batters box. The coach will hit a fly ball that he is holding after the pitch. The coach at 3<sup>rd</sup> will work on tag up technique.

1. The runner will lead-off and break down on the pitch.
2. The coach at 3<sup>rd</sup> will yell “Tag” and expect the runner to come back and hold up.
3. There are two ways on a tag up at third to advance to home. The coach can advance the runner by saying “go” or the runner can advance when she sees the ball fielded.
4. If it is a short fly ball the coach can have the runner “Make her throw” by having the runner fake an attempt to go home.

Note: You can put runners at 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> in this drill to teach them to read the ball, no matter where it goes.

Once your players have a good grasp of the basics of base running, you can increase the complexity of your drills to make them more game-like.

Combine running with batting practice or defensive drills. Do it daily. What your players do in practice will carry over into games

As an example, one drill that I like is “situations.” Put a defensive team on the field with players in every position. Coaches at the bases and one coach hitting the ball after each pitch. Put runners on base and a runner out from behind the batters box. The coach sits up game like situations. You can bunt, slap, line drive, sit up double plays, work on steals and throw downs, balls in the dirt, tag ups and any other situation you can think of. Ball-off-the-bat will train the instincts of your players and coaches.

“When you’re playing against a team that runs, it changes the dynamics of the game, says Revelle. “Along with trying to figure out how to pitch to their hitters, you’re also trying to figure out how to pitch to their hitters if they have runners on base.”

“There’s a lot more strategy to the game when you have weapons on the base paths.”

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