



Ball, Base, Back up

by MICHELE SMITH

During my holiday camp and my other clinics around the country we work on all aspects of the game but one of the things we always teach on defense is if you're a fielder—if you're playing somewhere on the field—you should never be standing and watching...that's for the spectators. And as Linda Derk, one of our great fielding coaches says, if you're standing around, you're growing roots in this game and that just won't do for making it to the next level!

That's where "ball - base - back-up" comes into play. If you're on the field, you should be involved in every single play! There's always something you should be doing or somewhere you should be moving to on the field.



Ball

If the ball is hit to you, then you have a responsibility to field it and get the ball to a bag and record an out if possible. First things first—an infielder's chances of recording an out are normally best if she can make the play over to first base. However, every once in a while if the play is taking a shortstop or a second baseman up the middle, the surest out might be at second base if there's a runner on first. The same is true for first and third basemen. Whenever possible, we would like to get the lead runner. Let me say that again—whenever possible we want to get the lead runner out!! Why? Because it puts our team at an advantage and helps out the pitcher. So our first responsibility is to get the ball.

Base

Now let's say the ball is put into play but not to you. If you're an infielder, your next responsibility now that the ball is not hit to you is to cover a bag. Go to the bag that is your responsibility. For the second baseman that would be second base. On a play in which the batter puts a bunt down, as a second baseman the proper bag on a bunt play potentially could be first base. For the third base position, it would be third base. Shortstop would be second base or third, depending on where the runner or runners are.

Back-Up

So the first two responsibilities are ball and then the base. Let's say you're an outfielder and the ball isn't hit to you and you don't have a bag to cover. You're responsible for covering throws or backing up. Infielders not involved with the ball or a bag are responsible for backing up as well. Properly backing up a hit ball or throw saves games on many occasions. This is one of the most important duties of a fielder yet one of the least acknowledged.

Even pitchers have the duty of backing up after they're not involved in the primary play. When a base hit goes to the outfield and there's a runner on second base, pitchers must back up either home or third base. Wait to see where the play develops and then go to the appropriate location. Always exit the infield on the third base line midway down the line and if the runner or runners are being sent home, then back up the catcher. If the runner is being held at third base, then turn toward third and back up the third baseman.

Always remember there's a place for everyone on every play and the entire team should always be moving. BALL, BASE, BACK-UP. Using that simple slogan will help players and coaches build a team that is in constant motion and prepared to make the plays.

Good luck and play hard!

Michele Smith

Keep up with Michele at www.MicheleSmith.com!

Michele presented the awards recently in Clearwater, Florida, where the ASA Gold championship games were played.