

Be a Better Baseball Player Tips to Live By

General

Baseball tryouts can often be pressure packed. Most tryouts consist of many players with little time to show what you can do. But, one thing that will set you apart is hustle. Run out to your position, sprint down the base path, and hustle on every play.

It doesn't take any talent to hustle. Run on and off the field. Run out all ground balls and pop-ups. Hustle will set a player apart

"Ragging" in baseball is all too common. Baseball is a humbling sport. What goes around often comes around. My recommendation? Bite your lip.

Make sure you are properly uniformed. Have your belt on properly, your stirrups and sanitary socks on, and matching undershirts and hats. Take pride in how you and your team look on the field.

Hitting

During batting practice, work on hitting the ball to the right side of the field. If there is a runner on second and nobody out during the game and you need to move the runner to third, a ground ball or fly ball to the right side could get the job done (instead of bunting). The advantage is that you can also punch a hit through the right side.

Should you guess what pitch is coming? In certain situations, most definitely. Generally, look fastball down, breaking pitch up. Use this approach on every pitch. If a pitcher has an extremely sharp slider or a wicked split finger fastball, try to take that pitch away by sometimes guessing the pitch is coming. You need to analyze a pitcher's habits and tendencies.

Slumps are inevitable in baseball. When slumping, try to get back to basics. Think about hitting the ball right up the box and judge yourself on solid contacts (and not necessarily hits). During a slump, maintain a positive outlook and be a team player. Keep playing solid defense and continue to run the bases aggressively. By doing the little things to help your team win, you will be able to keep a positive outlook...then, the slump will be gone before you know it.

Three simple rules to hit by:

1. Get a good pitch to hit. Not only do you have to know the strike zone, but you need to know your strengths and weaknesses in the strike zone.

2. Be quick with the bat. Bat speed will enable you to wait longer and explode on the ball.
3. Think. Remember what the pitcher likes to throw. Know the scouting report and anticipate pitches (yes, even guess at the proper time).

The best training tool for hitting is the wood bat. It instantly rewards you if your swing is a good one. By feeling the solid connection, you know you had a sound swing. It also penalizes you for a poor swing with a cracked bat or buzzing hands after poor contact.

Most programs use swings as a monitor for their batting practice. For example, each player gets two bunts, ten swings, and one suicide bunt. But, you might want to experiment with an alternative. Instead of swings being the monitor, try time. For example, give each hitter a minute and a half or two minutes for b.p. This forces the player to concentrate harder on getting their bunts down. It also forces the batting practice pitcher to throw strikes. This gives the hitter the opportunity to get more than ten swings if they maintain a good pace

Fielding

Don't pick up a dead ball with your glove. If you do this in practice, you may automatically do it in a game, and likely bobble the ball.

Practice catching the ball properly in the outfield. When making a throw from a fly ball, you should be behind the ball with some forward momentum. Catch the ball on the throwing hand side to make the transfer from catch to throw as efficient as possible.

When throwing from either the infield or the outfield, learn to throw a "four seamer". By properly gripping the baseball, you can get four seams of the ball cutting the air. This will create a straighter, stronger throw. If you don't know what a four seamer is, have a professional show you!

Learn how to do a proper "crow hop" from the outfield. By using your forward momentum and doing a crow hop, you will be able to maximize your throwing arm

When moving to field a fly ball, remember the words 'Get Sideways' By doing a drop step and remaining sideways on your approach, you will have a much better chance to field the ball cleanly. 'Getting Sideways' helps you avoid backpedaling, which often gets you in the most trouble.

Catcher

The catcher needs to exert him or herself as the field general. Communication on the baseball field is necessary and a good catcher will take control. The catcher has the view of the entire field and can make the proper call for throws to each base.

Pitching

Jim "Catfish" Hunter, Hall of Fame pitcher who threw a perfect game in 1968, says:

- 1) Throw what the catcher calls and believe in every pitch. When a pitcher starts thinking, that's when he gets in trouble.
- 2) You've got to have every pitch working for you. When I threw my perfect game, every pitch I threw, I knew where it was going.
- 3) Concentrate on the hitter. The only guy who's going to beat you is the guy with the bat. If you get him out, you're going to win

First Base

First basemen are sometimes known to be lumbering fielders. But, don't discount the value of a solid first baseman. Footwork separates the average fielder from the above average at first base. Work on your footwork around the bag in practice.

The most basic thing to learn at first base when fielding a throw is to NOT stretch too early. Only stretch upon seeing the trajectory and aim of the throw. Stretching too soon will only limit your range and tangle your feet!

Rapid Fire Dual Ball Infield

Use this drill to give infielders a ton of ground balls and throws in a short period of time.

Start with a coach and a bucket of balls at home plate. Hit grounders to third and have the third baseman turn two (5-4-3 double play). But, have the second baseman throw to a first baseman standing about 20 feet down the right field line (away from first base). As soon as the ball is hit to third, grab another ball and hit a grounder to shortstop. The shortstop is making the throw to first (6-3 putout). The shortstop is throwing directly to the first baseman at the first base bag. Empty a bucket of balls at a quick pace and what you will end up with is two piles of balls at the first baseman and at the alternate first baseman (standing 20 feet behind the bag)

Next, gather the balls and repeat the process. This time, make the third baseman throw to first and make the second baseman turn a double play (4-6-3) with the shortstop throwing to the alternate first baseman (20 feet behind the bag).

Gather the balls again and switch again to the shortstop turning two (6-4-3) and the third baseman again throwing to first (or if arms are weary, have the third baseman field and throw the balls out to the side).

Finally, do a round solely with the first baseman making a 3-6 putout. Shortstops just toss the ball off to the side.

Tremendous drill that gets hundreds of ground balls and throws achieved in a short period of time.

One eye Hitting Drill

Great drill for those who are pulling their head out on the swing. Take batting practice with the back eye closed or covered. This forces the hitter to follow the ball all the way in with the front eye. Thus, they tend to keep their head down throughout the swing.

"Japanese" Pitching Drill Great for developing control

The drill is used to develop great pitcher control by having the pitcher throw strikes at varying distances. The drill has a catcher set at a stationary plate. The plate never moves. The pitcher should begin throwing at a distance 1/2 of his normal pitching distance. You should have 6-8 distance markers with the first being at his starting point and the longest being twice his normal pitching distance. The markers should be at 10-foot intervals and in a straight line with the

plate. The object of the drill is to develop control by gradually moving toward and away from the targeted strike zone. The pitcher is required to throw 1-3 strikes from each marker before moving to the next. The catcher serves as the umpire. Variations of this drill may be to have 1-3 pitchers working and competing against each other. The drill teaches them to work fast, concentrate, and execute a perfect pitch. Make sure your pitchers are in condition for this drill. They will find that throwing strikes from longer distance requires great mechanics and builds arm strength. Make sure your players stretch and warm-up first.

"20 X 4"

Pitching Drill

Improves Control & Concentration

This drill is a pitching drill in which the young pitcher works at a smooth, rather fast pace, but only throw 50-60%. He should not be allowed to throw full speed. The objective of the drill is to teach concentration and develop great control. The pitcher has to throw 20 strikes before he throws 4 balls. He should be allowed to perform the drill at a shorter distance at first but he should be able to move to his regular pitching distance within a couple of weeks. If he throws 4 balls, he must start over. Be careful to not overwork him. However, keeping the distance short, emphasizing accuracy not speed, and making sure he proper stretches and warms up should prevent any chance of arm injury. With younger players you may want to make the drill a 10-3 drill. He must throw 10 strikes before he throw 3 balls or he must start over.

"Make Believe" Infield

Great warm-up for certain situations

The teams takes perfect infield by allowing every player to make a perfect catch and throw. The way this drill is conducted is the coach does not use a ball. He hits a "make-believe" ball. Each time the player goes through the correct motion of fielding the ball and making a perfect play. Each time the player receiving the throw will pat his glove to simulate a catch. Emphasis is placed on talking, following through, and making everything look perfect. No one will mess up or make a bad mistake. I have used this drill many, many times in practice and before games. It is especially good with young kids to emphasis correct body mechanics. It is also useful if you get to a field for a game and the playing surface is too wet or rough to take a "good" round of infield. Sometimes it is better not to use a real ball in warm-up if there is a risk of the ball taking a terrible bounce. Bad infield and warm-up may bring down "team esteem". I've never had a team take "make believe" infield that was anything less than great! It's always perfect!

Cut-off Relays

Great for building skills, speed, accuracy and confidence.

This drill is a great skill builder. There will be at least 5 players on a team. They line up about 30 feet apart and stretch about 120 feet across the field. You will have two teams or "lines" competing against each other. Make sure to have you catcher, first baseman, and third baseman on one end. Have an outfielder on the opposite end. Your middle infielder should be in the middle. The drill will start for both lines at the same time. The first team to take the ball to the other end and get it back is the winner. The ball must be caught and thrown by each player in the line. Teams may not skip a man. The catchers should practice catching and tagging a runner. The middle infielders should be taught to properly "round" the ball, make a proper relay catch and quick throw. We often do this drill and the losing team must do 5 or 10 pushups or squat thrust.

Catcher-----x-----x-----x-----Outfielder

The distances should be matched to the age. You may also have the outfielder let the ball go and hit the fence, before he goes retrieves it and makes his throw to the cutoff man. You may also want to make this a "total team" drill with the whole team having to catch and throw the ball to cover a long distance. If you have the room to do this, it is great to have the team work together to beat the clock. They must beat a set time or they "pay". You may also want to have the "line" make more than one trip down and back. It is great to make each "line" take the ball to the other end three times.