



INFIELD COACH



CONTEXTS:

- INSTRUCTOR BEGINNER
- MODULE: INFIELDING



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1

INTRODUCTION



In the space below, prepare a list of the **most important qualities** of a good infielder:

Infielder Qualities:



First Baseman:

Second Baseman:

Shortstop:

Third Baseman:



What Scouts Look For In Infielders

A good infield is worth its weight in gold to a successful team. A strong defense will take the opposition out of more rallies and save wear and tear on the pitching staff. Teams are looking for the following qualities in their infielders.

Fielding Ability: This is the one tool that has the greatest chance of improvement. While you cannot significantly increase great foot speed or a great arm, fielding has the greatest chance of improvement with practice. When judging fielding, scouts are looking for a number of traits:

- **Quick Feet:** First-step quickness and the ability to move quickly laterally and forward and back.
- **Range:** The ground they cover, body control, fielding balls to either side.
- **Soft Hands:** The ability to catch the ball smoothly in the center the glove and transfer to throwing hand.
- **Quick Hands:** The ability to field and/or adjust to tough hops.
- **Arm Strength:** Throws should be straight and not die as they approach the first baseman.
- **Makeup:** Willing to listen to coaches, umpires and show respect toward others, demonstrating leadership, hustle and desire, coachable.



How important is communication on the infield ?

What are situations that require communication ?

2

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS - DEFENSIVELY

General observations
Defensively



Good team defense involves having more than just the skills of catching and throwing. In fact, it is almost entirely about awareness and commitment to the team. Therefore, it is essential for each player to know what to do on each play, to be in position and be able to execute at full speed.

- Awareness of game situations is vital to good team defense. The situation dictates the actions of the players. Although there is normally a primary objective (fielding a ground ball and throwing it to a base), there are often many “secondary” actions that occur as a result of speed, conditions, directions, errors, etc. To get better at this, position players need to experience all types of situations, whether through real games, simulated games, or practice drills.
- Communication in the field is teammates talking, signaling, informing (variety of forms of communicating) with each other. It should be affirmed and reaffirmed from the coaches. Infielders must be pro-active and do it themselves throughout the entire game.



- Pre-pitch communication and preparation is another form of communication. Fielders must remind themselves and others of potential happenings on each play. For example, with a man on first and a 3-2 count with two outs, everyone must be reminded not to cover second on the steal, as well as to make the play to first. There are many short, simple reminders to help teammates, and they must be used for a team to realize its potential.
- Communication during the play requires fielders to help direct teammates or confirms actions during the play. For example, with a runner stealing, the first baseman yells “runner,” but if the ball is hit to the shortstop, they should be reminded to throw to first instead of second with a “one, one” call. Another example would be the shortstop telling the pitcher to “step off” while the runner at second base gets too large of a lead. It is well known that communication on pop flies to the infield is important.

Notes:

3

POSITIONING



An alert capable defense makes for a winning team. The ability to make the routine play consistently is the hallmark of solid defensive play. Good defense will keep a team in most games.

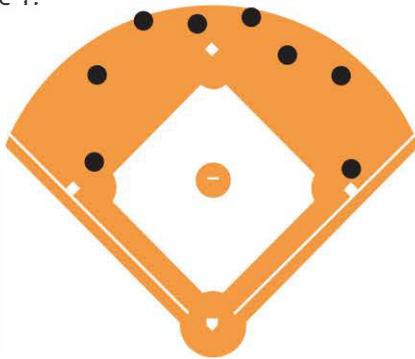
► Build your defense up the middle

We have all heard this! Develop the shortstop and second baseman. The majority of batted balls are handled by the infield and of these; the majority is handled by the shortstop and second baseman. Many coaches feel the shortstop should be the team's best athlete/player because they are involved in more defensive plays than any other team infielder. An alert, capable middle infield is a primary ingredient for a winning team.

► Where Grounders Go

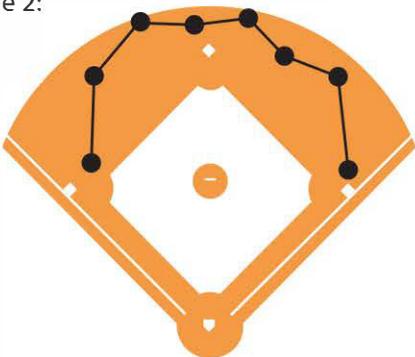
1 On the field illustration below, plot (place a dot) where you believe ground balls go. Rank in order from most to least (most being furthest from home plate).

Example 1:



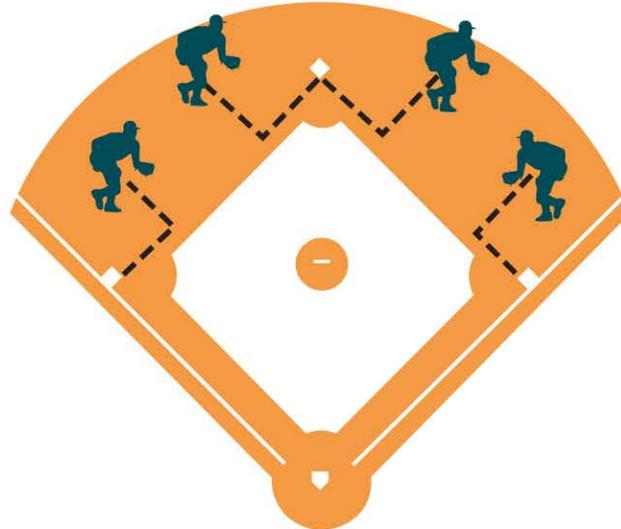
2 Connect the points to form a graph.

Example 2:



► Straight Up Infield Defense

The illustration under shows approximate positioning in a “straight up” situation. The players adjust from the “straight up” position depending on a number of variables, including type, speed and strength of the hitter, tendencies and type of pitcher, pitcher’s velocity, and the range of each infielder.



Generally, the starting point for each position is:

Third baseman:

4-6 steps off the third base line, toward the hole between third and short and 3-5 steps behind third base, toward left field.

Shortstop:

6-8 steps from second base and 6-8 steps off the baseline, toward left field.

Second baseman:

6-8 steps from second base and 6-8 steps off the baseline, toward right field.

First baseman:

4-6 steps off the first base line, toward second base and 6-8 steps behind first base, toward right field.

Notes:

- Positioning is at the core of team defense. In general, when one player shades a batter one way, the other players must adjust accordingly. Too often, the shortstop will take away the hole, but the second baseman won't move up the middle to compensate.
- Positioning should not be something done only when the coach moves players. It should be done all game long, continually, by each player, as they learn more about the hitters and more about the situation. In addition, players should remind each other of where the batter hit it last time, and even tell teammates where to play.
- Positioning is simply too important to let pitches go by with fellow teammates out of position.



Reflection: *When you start with young or new infielders, describe how you position them.*

Reflection: *Describe the records you keep (if any) of hitters and their tendencies during the game?*



4

INFIELD POSITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES



In your small group, each member will take one infield role and identify the responsibilities for that position. This information will be shared in your small groups.

First Baseman Responsibilities:

Second Baseman Responsibilities:

Third Baseman Responsibilities:

Shortstop Responsibilities:



Positional Responsibilities: First Baseman

The first baseman does not necessarily play first because they are the tallest player on the team! The first baseman must have an excellent glove, be able to catch anything thrown near them. Speed is not a determining factor at this position, though the fielder still must be quick to move and react. They must be fearless, unafraid to stretch out and make a difficult catch or scoop while keeping their foot on the bag.

▶ Key Points:

- The two main responsibilities for the first baseman is to field balls (groundballs and pop ups) that come in their direction, or to cover first base and take throws on balls fielded by other infielders.
- First basemen are taught to get an out.
- Throws wide or short of the base are to be stopped, even if it means coming off the base.
- First basemen will hold the runner at first base in a stealing situation.
- Get lead runners whenever possible - but settling for the sure out at first base. On groundballs that pull the first baseman far from the bag, the first baseman should know they can tag the base himself, and when to toss it to the pitcher covering.
- In a bunt situation, the first baseman will usually charge the ball, allowing the second baseman to cover first base.
- Base hit to right field and centerfield with a runner at second base, the first baseman acts as a cut-off to home plate.
- The first baseman will back up any throw coming in from left field to second base.
- Pop fly coverage for the area around first base, into foul territory, toward the pitcher's mound and up to home plate area.



Video Information: <http://www.videojug.com/interview/playing-first-base-in-baseball-2>

Notes:



Positional Responsibilities: Second Baseman

The second baseman is mobile and quick on their feet. Raw speed is not a requirement, but range and quickness are assets. Naturally, the second baseman must have a solid glove, as must all of your infielders. A second baseman must be able to make decisions and think on their feet, as they have many responsibilities.



Key Points:

- The second baseman's responsibilities are to field balls (ground balls or pop ups) hit in their direction and make throws to bases for outs.
- The second baseman covers first in a bunt situation.
- They will back up a play at first base on infield groundballs to third and short with no runner at first base. Get to the foul line behind first base as quickly as possible.
- Communicate with the shortstop and the pitcher on the possibility of a comebacker.
- Play at double play depth; in three or four steps and over a few steps toward the bag. "Pinch the middle."
- Cover second base on force plays at second or in double play situations and the ground ball is hit to third or shortstop.
- Communicate with shortstop to cover second base in a steal situation.
- Cover second base when the shortstop is the cutoff to third base.
- Cover first base on a play at the plate with the first baseman the cut-off.
- Pop fly priority on pop ups in the area from behind second base, toward the pitcher's mound, into foul territory behind first base and into short right field.
- Act as a relay for throws by outfielders on balls hit to the fence.
- In some systems, act as a "safety" to back up the shortstop to receive throws from outfielders in extra base hit situations.
- With a runner on first base communicate with the shortstop to cover second base in a "hit and run" or steal situation.



Video Information: <http://www.videojug.com/interview/playing-second-base-in-baseball-2>

Notes:



Positional Responsibilities: Third Baseman

The third baseman must be quick on their feet, and possess excellent reflexes. According to the chart on page 2, the third baseman is faced with as many groundballs and plays as the shortstop and second baseman. Therefore, playing third base requires a very solid glove, soft hands and agility.

▶ Key Points:

- The third baseman's responsibilities are to field balls (ground balls or pop ups) hit in their direction and make throws to bases for outs.
- Pop fly coverage is around third base into foul territory, to the pitcher's mound and up to the homeplate area.
- Usually allow for the third baseman to field any balls hit to their left in front of the shortstop.
- The third baseman will cover third base for force outs or on tag plays on throws from other players.
- In bunt situations with a runner at first base, the third baseman will move in toward the batter in order to field bunts and throw to either second base or first base. The third baseman must return to third base should the bunt not be toward third base.
- In bunt situations with a runner at second base or with runners at first and second, the third baseman must "read" and react to a bunted ball toward third base. If the pitcher can field the bunt, the third baseman returns to the base preparing for a force out. If the pitcher cannot field the bunt, the third baseman will field it and throw to first base.
- With runners at first and second, a double play situation, the third baseman must decide to either tag the base and throw to first base or throw the ball immediately to second base.
- The third baseman is a cut off to throws from left field to homeplate.



Video Information: <http://www.videojug.com/expertanswer/playing-third-base-in-baseball-2/what-are-the-defensive-responsibilities-of-a-third-baseman-in-baseball>

Notes:



Positional Responsibilities: Shortstop

The shortstop is the prototype infielder. Their qualities include: quick feet, range, soft and quick hands, arm strength.



Key Points:

- The shortstop is responsible for fielding balls (ground balls or pop ups) hit in their direction and make throws to bases for outs.
- The shortstop covers pop flies from foul territory behind third base and short left field to short center field and in toward the pitcher's mound
- The shortstop covers second in a bunt situation, runner on first base.
- Communicate with the second baseman and the pitcher on the possibility of a comebacker.
- Play at double play depth; in three or four steps and over a few steps toward the bag. "Pinch the middle."
- Cover second base on force plays at second or in double play situations and the ground ball is hit to the first baseman or second baseman.
- Communicate with second baseman to cover second base in a steal situation.
- Cover third base on a play at the plate with the third baseman being the cutoff.
- Cover third base in certain bunt situations with runners at first and second (or runner at second).
- Act as a relay for throws by outfielders on balls hit to the fence.
- In some systems, act as a "safety" to back up the second baseman to receive throws from outfielders in extra base hit situations.
- With a runner on first base communicate with the second baseman to cover second base in a "hit and run" or steal situation.



Video Information: <http://www.videojug.com/interview/playing-shortstop-in-baseball-2>

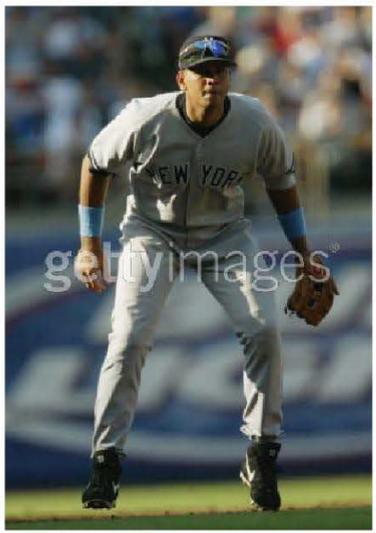
Notes:

5

INFIELDING MECHANICS - THE FUNDAMENTALS



Ready Position



Semi-upright



Creep



Two steps

- Ready position is athletic
- Semi-upright (you see the same defensive stance in other sports)
- A hop, a creep, two steps are ways to get player in position to move as pitch enters the hitting zone
- Glove (hands) are in front

Notes:



In small groups, identify the key elements for:

Approaching "Routine" Groundballs:

Blank area for notes on approaching routine groundballs.

Fielding the Groundball:

Blank area for notes on fielding the groundball.

Throwing:

Blank area for notes on throwing.

Moving Laterally:

Blank area for notes on moving laterally.

The Backhand Play:

Blank area for notes on the backhand play.



Approaching “Routine” Groundballs

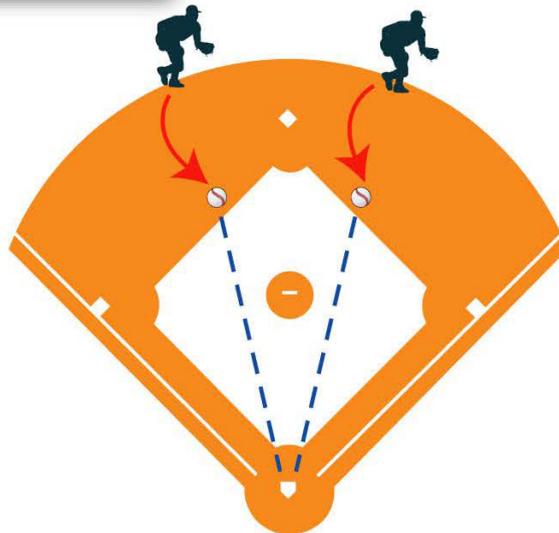
As illustrated, the fielder sets up with the glove centered (between the feet), toward the left eye. Fielding the ball in this position allows for the infielder to move more fluidly toward their target. “Left eye” is a better position to react to balls that take a “bad” or unpredicted hop. The glove hand is freer to move up and down when it is not directly in the middle of the body,



Left eye



As the groundball is hit, the player moves their feet to get into this position, to get to the **right** of the ground ball (so that the ball is on their left eye).



Notes:



Fielding Position

- Approach groundball to get “left eye” – puts infielder in good throwing position.



Left eye



- As the player approaches, break down steps to get under control.

- Knees are bent, body is low.
- Glove is in front, open and under the ball.



- Arms are reaching.
- Bare hand is on top, open, ready to take ball from glove.
- Glove does not close, rather “stops” the ground ball.
- Eyes are tracking the ball to the glove.

Notes:



Throwing

- Line up shoulders and hips with target in good balance position.
- Swing throwing arm back.
- Point the ball away from target (fingers on top of the ball).



- Throwing should be a circular action.
- Move toward target on completion of throw.

Notes:



Moving Laterally

“Ready” position at point of contact.



Cross-over or drop-step in direction of batted ball

The ground ball hit to either side usually means the ball is on the ground longer and therefore, the infielder must be able to field and throw quicker than a ball hit at them. When moving laterally it is important to point out that the player should be in the best fielding position possible once they have fielded the ball. Thus, if the fielder is able to get “left eye,” they will field the ball with two hands and be moving toward the target (normally first base). It may also mean that the infielder must field the ball with one hand, either backhand or off to the side (glove side).



When working with young infielders, it can be useful and fun for them to work on backhand plays and throwing the ball while on the run. More will be covered regarding both backhand and slow rollers.

Notes:



The Backhand Play

Slow ground balls to the backhand side:

- Move into position, fielding the ball toward the middle of the body.
- Field low to high.
- Glove moves (shovels) back toward ball.
- Feet moving "through" groundball to good throwing position.



Plant and throw:

- Field ball against right foot, stay low, load and throw.

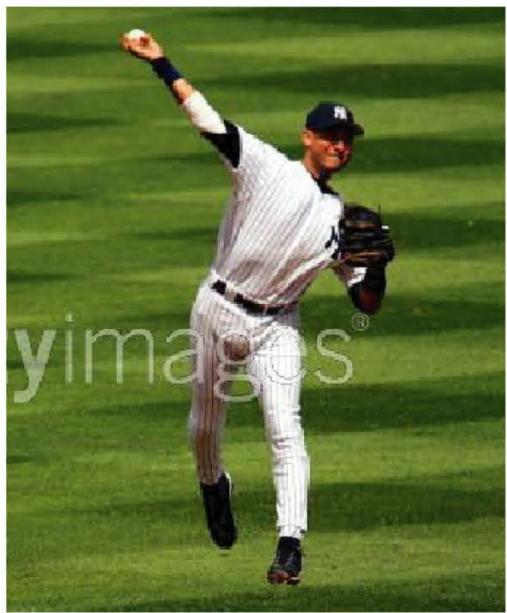


Hop, plant and throw:

- Field ball off right foot, momentum stops with short hop on right foot and throwing position.

Stop, plant and throw :

- Field ball off left foot, plant right, and throw.



- Field ball off left foot, jump and throw (more difficult play).

Notes:



Make a list of common faults that you have experienced and that coaches you can use to discuss in your small group setting. Examples may include: “flipping glove,” fielding with one knee on ground, fielding straight-legged, moving backward or “sitting” on ground ball.

Common Faults:

6

BASIC INFIELDING GROUNDBALLS ROUTINE AND DRILLS



The following routine and drills can be done indoor or outside, with young players (beginners) to college age.

▶ **One hand**

- Glove in front
- Bend the knees
- Reach for the ball

▶ **Two hands**

- Glove in front
- Bend the knees
- Reach for the ball
- Bare hand does the work – transfer to throwing hand
- Footwork – movement will include fielding and getting to throwing position

▶ **Short hop**

- Aggressive to high bounce – field long hop or short hop – one hand or two hands
“Don’t let the ball bounce twice”

▶ **Backhand**

- Field in center of body as body is turned to side
- Fielding low to high
- Glove moves (shovels) back toward ball
- Feet moving “through” groundball to good throwing position



▶ *Approach with feet to field toward center of body*

▶ *Fielding through*

▶ *Planting feet on GB needing reach*

▶ *Replacing feet on GB needing reach*

▶ *Slow rollers or high hops*

- Aggressive toward ball
- "Left eye" or get to right of ball
- Field out front, glove hand outside of body
- Throw on the run (if possible, field on left foot, throw on right)

▶ *Ground balls from knees*

- Players are on both knees facing coach – either rolling or fungo groundball
- Players will use only their glove to field the ball, transfer ball to throwing hand and throw to a coach or other player



Notes:



Describe and be prepared to demonstrate a drill that has been particularly successful for you. Or, use this space to make notes about a drill you have seen at this workshop.

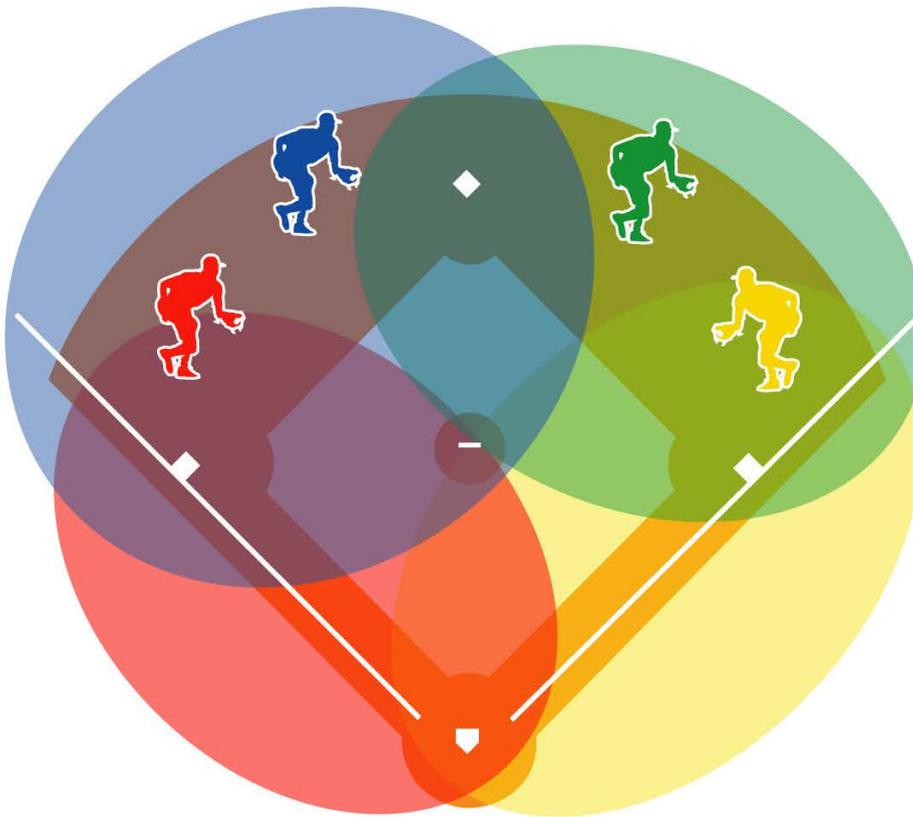
Design a drill:

7

POP FLY COVERAGE FOR INFIELDERERS



The shortstop has priority in the field, followed by the second baseman, third baseman, first baseman.



Pop Fly Coverage
for Infielders

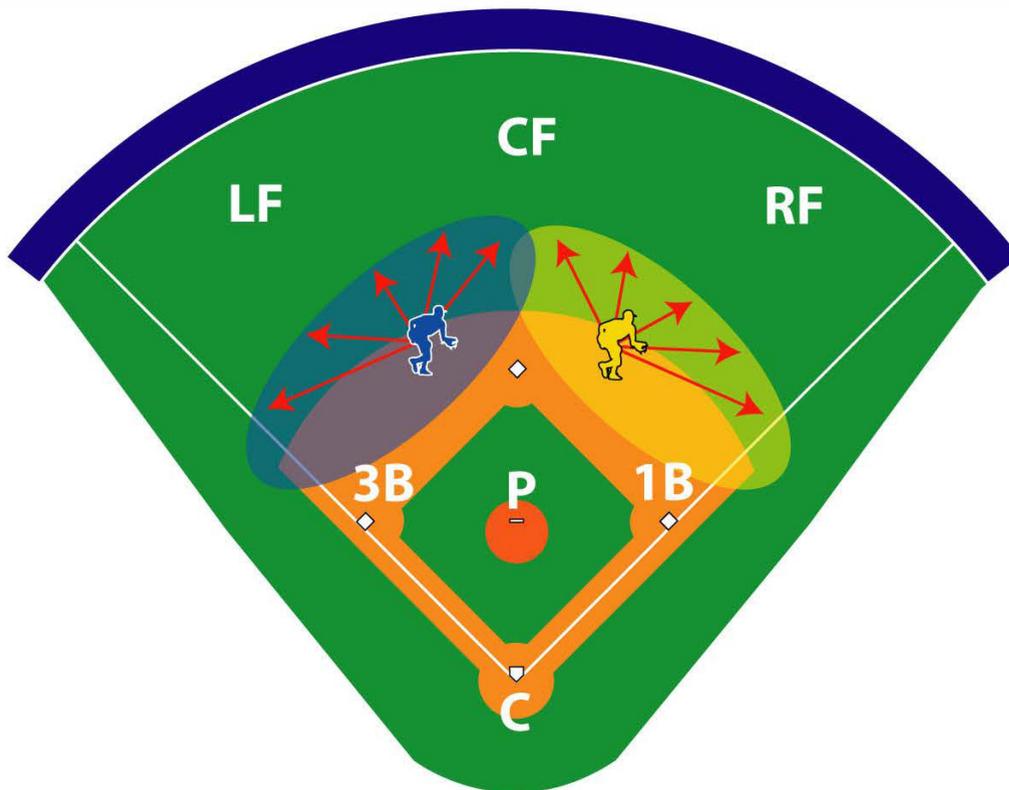
Notes:

8

POP FLY COVERAGE WITH OUTFIELDERS



Outfield has priority over Infield. The infielder attempts to catch all pop or fly balls hit. The outfielder will “call off” the infielder. This illustration shows the shortstop position and the area that they will cover. As illustrated by the directional arrows for the shortstop and second baseman below, the objective for **ALL** defensive players is to catch a pop fly. That is, every player is oriented to catch the ball. Positional priority and communication will prevail as to who actually catches the ball.



Notes:

9

SUMMARY - MAKING THE ROUTINE PLAY

»» Preparation:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Keep your mind in the game every pitch.</p> <p>2 Keep your team and teammates in the game every pitch.</p> <p>3 100 – 120 pitches every game.</p> <p>4 Plan ahead for the situation.</p> <p>5 Avoid being distracted by poor calls, poor at-bats, errors, other team’s comments, parents’ comments.</p> <p>6 Mental visualization and constant rehearsing how you want the ball to come to you.</p> <p>7 Know the score, the inning, the outs, your defense, opponent’s offense.</p> <p>8 Know the speed of runner, type of infield.</p> <p>9 Errors are part of the game:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Learn to accept those you cannot control. ■ Know the ones which are physical vs mental errors. | <p>10 Remind each other verbally and non-verbally what you plan on doing with the ball if it is hit to you.</p> <p>11 Communicate with your teammates.</p> <p>12 Practice how you plan on playing the game:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Perfect practice makes permanent. ■ Good habits build confidence during practice. ■ Check work ethic. ■ Set attainable, realistic goals. <p>13 Don’t take any ball or any play for granted, EVER.</p> <p>14 Same approach every time.</p> <p>15 Treat ALL plays the same.</p> <p>16 Make the routine play.</p> <p>17 Pre-game practice (work ethic, game intensity, mental discipline, daily commitment to improve, organized).</p> |
|--|--|

»» Reflections:

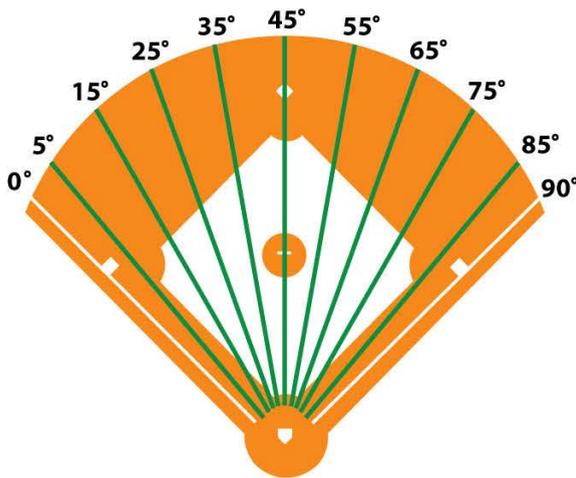
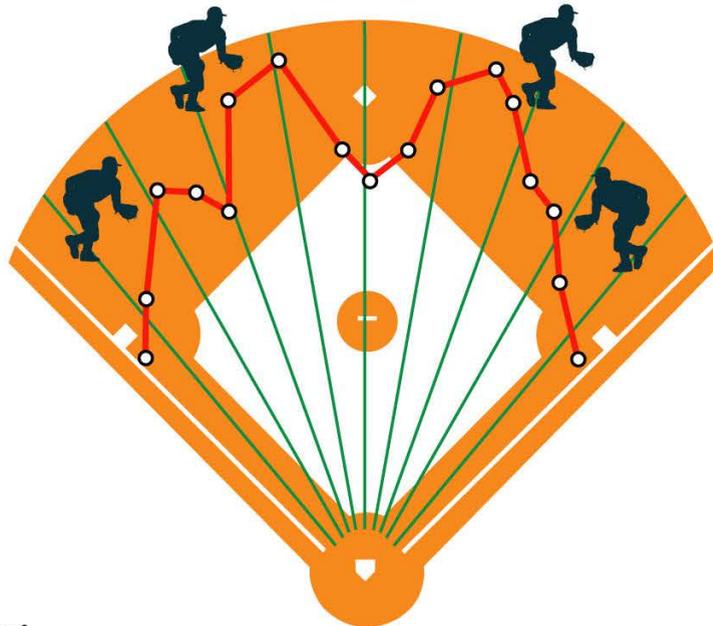
From the comments above, identify the most meaningful to you :

Add any statements that you believe would be important to this list :

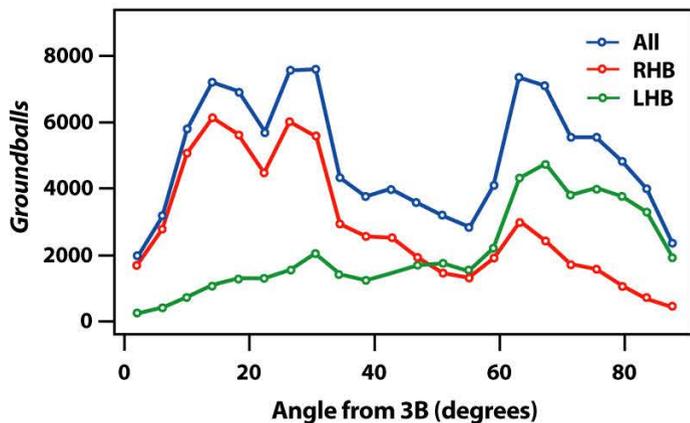


APPENDIX - WHERE GROUNDERS GO

Walsh's plotting system, indicates the location of approximately 100,000 balls hit during the 2005 and 2006 season. It verifies the well-known belief, stated above; quality middle infielders are significant to a strong defensive team. However, it is interesting to note that almost as many balls travel in the direction of the third baseman. Therefore, this position becomes equally important. If we account for the data above, our infield should look something like this.



Where Grounders Go



Reference: Walsh, John May 09, 2007, **Infield Defense - Back to Basics**

<http://www.hardballtimes.com/main/article/infield-defense-mdash-back-to-basics/>