

Play Ball Like the Pros

TIPS FOR KIDS FROM 20 BIG LEAGUE STARS

Derek Jeter

Ryan Howard

CC Sabathia

Mark Teixeira

Rocco Baldelli

Jason Bay

Carl Crawford

Evan Longoria

Jacoby Ellsbury

Scott Baker

Chris Iannetta

Akinori Iwamura

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Ian Kinsler

Jon Lester

Russell Martin

Joe Mauer

Dustin Pedroia

Jimmy Rollins

Geovany Soto



STEVEN KRASNER

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STEVEN KRASNER


PEACHTREE

ATLANTA

For my father, Julius, who passed down to me
his passion for the game of baseball—
and for my son, Jeffrey, a better player than both of us,
who has carried on the family tradition

—S. K.



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THIRD BASE

**EVAN
LONGORIA**

There are times when a third baseman doesn't need a glove to make a play. He can just use his bare hand. But fielding a slow roller or a bunt that way can be tough, especially if you're on the run.

While you're in your stance as a third baseman, what do you look at to see if a batter might be bunting for a base hit?

Sometimes the batter may be holding the bat at a different angle, or maybe the batter does something different with the bat. Maybe if a hitter usually has a wiggle in the bat as he gets ready for the pitch, he might stop the wiggle before getting ready to bunt. Hitters planning to bunt may change their hand position on the bat or keep their bodies still.

Or sometimes even the batter's facial expression will give it away. Sometimes you see him take a peek toward third base to see where the third baseman is playing.

Get in the habit of observing batters carefully. There are a lot of different little signs that can tell you a batter is going to bunt.

So you, as a third baseman, are concentrating on the batter?

I'm always looking at the batter whether he's a bunter or not. But certain guys are more likely to bunt. For example, the number four hitter is not going to bunt. But obviously when number one or number nine is in the box, I'm looking for signs that he's planning to bunt.

And when a ball is bunted, or if there is a slow roller hit toward third base, how do you approach making that play?

There are different ways. If it's a slow roller and a slow runner is running, you want to attack the ball aggressively. You try to get around the ball, field it with your glove, and be moving toward first base as you field it.

What do you mean by "getting around it?"

As you run in, you have to make a semicircle toward the foul line and then back toward first base when you field the ball. This way you can get your momentum going toward first base when you make your throw.

How do you make a bare-handed play?

As you're bending down to pick up the ball, if you're a right-handed thrower, you want to be stepping forward with your left foot. Then get your feet in the correct position so you can make a good throw to first base after you have picked up the ball. But the biggest thing is making sure you've picked up the ball. You can't make the play without getting the ball off the ground!

Do you pick up the ball from the top or scoop it up?

You want to stay underneath the ball with your bare hand and try and scoop it from the ground up. You want to get your fingers underneath the ball.



How do you make the throw after making the bare-handed pickup?

You usually throw with a sidearm or underhand motion. Be careful, because you're going to have to judge quickly where you're going to aim the throw. When you throw with this type of motion and arm angle, the ball is going to tail back toward the first-base line. So you have to aim a little more to the second-base position because the throw will tail back toward the first baseman.

How hard do you charge in to make this play?

You have to get there with some speed, but at the same time you have to be under control. If you're rushing and out of control, the chances are you're not going to be able to pick up the ball while you're running at full speed. So you want to run as fast as you can to about five feet from the ball and then start breaking down to scoop it up.

When you make this play, you have to be low enough to the ground to be able to get the ball off the ground. The biggest issues are being under control yourself and knowing who is running and how fast that person is.

Why is it important to know the speed of the batter who is running to first base?

If you have a fast guy running, you probably need to go 40 percent faster and try and throw the ball quicker than if you have a slow runner moving. With a slower runner, you can take a little more time and make sure you're under control.

How do the mechanics of the bare-handed pickup and throw on a slow roller or a bunt compare to a routine ground ball to third?

On a routine ground ball, the ball gets to you faster, but for the most part, you know how much time you have to throw to first base, and you're able to process that information in your usual way. The scoop of the ball and the throw to first base has to happen much quicker. But with the slow roller or bunt you have a lot more variables going around in your mind at once. Handling the ball in these situations calls for more complicated mechanics and can take more time.

What are the mechanics of fielding and throwing to first base on a routine ground ball?

After fielding the ball, you have to get your body into whatever position you're comfortable throwing in. Everything depends on how good your arm is. If you don't have a strong arm, you have to really get your body and momentum going toward first. But a guy who has a tremendous arm can probably just stand straight up and make a strong throw to first.

For me, the primary objective is to catch the ball. Then you reset your feet. I try to point my left shoulder to first base to make a good, accurate throw. Usually you make an overhand throw on a routine play.

Is playing third base the same as playing shortstop?

You can't play third base like it's the shortstop position. Third base is more of a reaction position. I think playing shortstop is more like being in a dance out there on the field. You have to have rhythm and you have to be ready to go in either direction.

At third base, you can be down in your fielding stance a lot earlier and be ready right away to move from that stance, because you have to be able to dive and take one hard step to your right or left and field the ball. There are not really a lot of plays where you're going to take four or five steps and field a ground ball the way you do at shortstop.



Arm angle: The position of your arm as you throw the ball.

Breaking down: Slowing down.

Overhand: A throwing motion in which the arm comes up close to and past the ear when releasing the ball.

Sidearm: A throwing motion in which the arm is about waist-high and parallel to the ground upon release of the ball.

Stance: A player's body position.

Stirrups: Worn over socks, stirrups have just a strap of fabric that loops under the middle of the foot. Usually of a contrasting color to the socks.

Tail: The sideways movement of a thrown ball. For a right-handed thrower, the ball will "tail" from left to right as it nears the target.

Underhand: A throwing motion in which the palm of the hand faces up toward the sky. Generally a soft, but firm, toss.

Wiggle in the bat: Movement of the bat back and forth as a hitter awaits a pitch.



Triple the Fun, Twice!

Triple plays don't happen very often. But on July 17, 1990, at Fenway Park, the Boston Red Sox grounded into a triple play. Not once...but twice in the same game! And both times, it was Minnesota's Gary Gaetti, Al Newman, and Kent Hrbek who tripled the Twins' fun and snuffed out any possible Red Sox rallies.

In the fourth inning, the bases were loaded. The Red Sox had put Minnesota pitcher Scott Erickson in deep trouble. But on Erickson's next pitch, Tom Brunansky hit a hard grounder to Gaetti, the Twins' third baseman. Gaetti caught the ball, right near the third-base bag. He calmly stepped on the base. One out. Then he threw to Newman, covering second base, and Newman stepped on that bag. Two outs. Newman quickly relayed the ball to Hrbek, Minnesota's first baseman. The throw beat Brunansky. Three outs...a triple play! There were high fives all around as the Twins raced to their dugout.

In the eighth inning, there was a virtual instant replay. This time, there were runners on first and second base, and up stepped Red Sox player Jody Reed to the plate. Reed hit the ball on the ground, right at Gaetti. The third baseman stepped on the bag, and threw to Newman at second. Newman relayed the ball to Hrbek. Once again, the Twins had pulled off a triple play!

It was the first time in Major League history that one team had turned two triple plays in the same game. The Red Sox, however, had the last laugh. Boston won the game, 1-0.



HERE'S THE SITUATION

It's the last inning. You're up by one run. There's one out and the opposing team has runners at first and third. You're playing third base and the batter hits a hard one-hopper right at you. The runner from third breaks for home as soon as the ball is hit.

Do you throw home in an attempt to cut down the tying run at the plate? Or should you try for a double play, which could end the game and give your team the victory?

HERE'S THE SOLUTION

There's really no easy answer here. You need to figure out what to do as the ball is approaching you. A lot of information must be processed quickly.

Is the ball hit straight at you?

How fast a runner is the batter?

If the answers to those questions are "Yes, the ball is coming right to me," and "No, the batter doesn't run well," then you may want to take a chance on turning the game-ending double play.

But if the ball isn't hit to you that hard or if the batter is pretty fast, your odds of turning the double play are slim. In this case, you might want to throw home to stop the tying run from scoring.

No matter what, you want to make sure you get at least one out on the play, whether it's at home, second, or even at first base.



Memories



I GREW UP in Downey, California. I played baseball starting at age four, from T-ball all the way up.

My dad was my coach from the time I was very young until the time I was in eighth grade, when I told him I wanted to move on and play for another coach. He was never really that hard on me, but I didn't want the other kids to think I was being favored because my dad was the coach.

For the most part I played shortstop and I pitched. Was I a good pitcher? No. I was a good athlete, but I never really threw hard. I did some pitching in high school out of necessity.

I played in a league called the Savio Patriots. It was a Catholic School, St. Dominic's Savio, and they had a baseball league. They had four teams, so I played that until I was seven or eight, and then I moved over to the DJAA (Downey Junior Athletic Association). I played in the Downey Little League. That's where I met a lot of kids who are still my best friends today.

There were four good, advanced twelve- and thirteen-year-olds when I played in that league—kids who were full-grown at that age, kids like you see at the Little League World Series throwing 70 miles an hour. I remember facing

them a handful of times, and I dreaded it because they were really throwing gas in there. It wasn't a fun day when we faced them.

I was a line-drive hitter. I hit some home runs, but I wasn't really a home-run hitter until I got to college. I wasn't physically mature. I wasn't fast, either. I could just hit. I hit for average.

I was always excited to go play. The first team I played with wore stirrups and I would end up crying when I put my stirrups on because the hook of material underneath my foot was so uncomfortable. I really hated putting those on. Finally they got me the two-in-one socks, and I was a lot happier. They were red and white.

After some games we would go to a pizza joint where they had video games. We would go there and hang out. We had a lot of the team parties there. It was a fun time.