

OUTFIELD PHILOSOPHY

Defense and pitching win championships! Our goal as outfielders at Washington State University is not solely as offensive contributors, but as versatile players. Our responsibility is to manufacture Division One players that can contribute nightly in Pullman and teaching defense is an essential part of our job. Developing into a productive defender takes hard work and commitment. Our job as a staff is to educate outfielders on the importance of game speed throughout our daily work along with the physical and mental challenge of going out every day to upgrade and maintain defensive preparation. Every night we need 27 outs to win. Skillful outfield play controls damage and contributes to achieving outs in a proficient manner. When the ball reaches the outfield it has arrived at the last line of defense. We must build a forceful final line. Remember. ..

“We are either doing it right, or we are doing it wrong!”

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THE BASICS OF A COUGAR OUTFIELDER

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PRE-PITCH FUNDAMENTALS

- Stance
 - Check body weight distribution - athletic position.
 - Slightly open to the gap.
 - Body momentum at contact point.
 - Drop step and read ball's path.
 - Stay low.
 - Hands never rest on the knees or lower body.
 - Anticipate.
- Positioning
 - Straight Up
 - Left fielder lines up with first and second base.
 - Right fielder lines up with third and second base.
 - Center fielder shades to the opposite side of home and second unless noted as a pull hitter in the scouting report as most pitches are away in nature.
 - Straight up is 5, with 2 being shallow straight and 8 being deep straight.
 - Pull Side
 - Right-handed hitter - 3, 6 or 9
 - Left-handed hitter - 1, 4 or 7
 - All three outfielders should move together whenever possible to a hitter's pull side.
 - It is important that the center fielder takes responsibility for communication to the back side of all movement.
 - The back side gap should be covered.
 - Oppo Side
 - Right-handed hitter - 1, 4 or 7
 - Left-handed hitter - 3, 6 or 9
 - All outfielders should move together.
 - Remember the back side gap must be covered.
 - A hitter having problems pulling the fastball is most likely to handle the off speed pitch and be productive to the strong side gap.
 - Two Strikes
 - It is encouraged to move towards the weak side with two strikes on all hitters.
 - Off side outfielder should also sink in a bit.
 - The exception is the 3-2 count - you may want to move to straight up.
 - Movement In or Back
 - Challenge powerless hitters by moving outfielders shallow (1, 2 or 3).
 - Early in the game force hitters to hit the ball over our head.

- All hitters on occasion are going to find a gap or run into one, but this should not affect our percentages.
- All outfield movement is situational.
- You should use the rules in general, not the exceptions.
- Lefty vs. Lefty Matchup
 - Outfielders are always positioned slightly towards the opposite field.
 - Adjust the degree of oppo with the swing power and approach of the hitter.
 - Also adjust based on pitcher's velocity and breaking ball type - less oppo with curveball and change, more oppo with slider.

GROUND BALLS

- Non-Throwing
 - Butt down.
 - Glove in front.
 - Get ball back to infield immediately.
- Throwing Mechanics
 - Glove foot, upper body weight over front knee produces power.
 - Hand to the back of the head.
 - Front elbow (glove) aims at target.
 - Replace front side with back side - deceleration.
 - Pull and reach - follow through!
 - Three step release.
- Round-Off
 - Footwork allows a direct body path to the throwing area.
 - Be aggressive with open step.
 - A minimum of three strides through the point of the catch.
- Pivot/Spin Move
 - The last alternative in the ground ball process.
 - Catch the ball first.
 - Then spin and lock in on throwing target.
 - Glove side groundball.
 - Pivot/spin allows you to line up your feet to target without wasting steps.
- Cutting Off
 - Do not let the ball into the gap!
 - Damage control.
- Closing In

- The speed in which the ball is hit will dictate your closing speed.

FLY BALLS

- Non-Throwing
 - Nose on ball - no drifting.
 - Work feet to the ball's downward flight path.
 - Work hard to get behind every fly ball.
- Throwing Situation
 - Be patient!
 - Minimum three strides through the point of the catch.
 - Position body to catch the ball on the glove side of the head, face high.
 - You can never be too far behind the ball - late break better than early break.
- Headed Back
 - Head down and go.
 - Beat the ball to a spot!
 - Trust your instincts!
- Headed In
 - Stay on toes.
 - Communicate early!
- Line Drive Approach
 - Freeze and attack.
 - Run through all line drives.
 - Never slow and sit to catch.
- All Situational Throws
 - Throws are low, cuttable and hard.
 - Man on third base - in tag-up situation prefer the ball to be thrown in the air or on one hop to the catcher.
- Jumps
 - Live balls off the bat - get jumps during batting practice daily.
 - Focus on initial break to develop a good habit of first step quickness.
 - Explode a minimum of five strides to the ball.
 - Finish the play during live reads - catch the ball!
 - Always concentrate through the play.
 - Game speed!
 - Encounter every possible angle off the bat.
 - Rule the grassland!

- We don't just make catches, we make plays!
- We are always ready to make a play!

- Pop-Up Priorities
 - Center fielder over corner outfielders.
 - Outfielder with the more appropriate throwing angle and better arm in throwing situations.
 - Outfielders over all infielders - know the communication and get to everything.

COMMUNICATION

A championship team has many characteristics that are special. Communication is one of the principal ingredients. Communication among teammates may seem insignificant; nevertheless, it remains the backbone of the defense. Communication is more important during outfield play than any other responsibility.

Effective communication is first and foremost and eliminates needless injuries. Some examples of when communication is critical:

- Flyball Priorities - "ball" or "you"
- Relays
 - Fence communication
 - Throw destination
- Outfield Positioning
- Situations
 - No doubles
 - Movement
 - Throwing strategy - which runner is most likely to be out.
 - Locating winning and tying runs.
 - Securing the double play - keep the hitter off second.
- Conditions
 - Sun
 - Wind
 - Wet turf
 - Slow turf
 - Fast turf
- Fence Recognition
 - Warning track
 - Fence
- The outfielder who is not catching the ball tells his teammates who is catching the ball and where the ball should be thrown or if the runners are tagging, half-way, etc.

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IDENTIFY THE HITTER

- Power
- Slap / weak
- Pull
- Opposite
- Straight
- Pitching game plan vs. hitters.
- Study spray chart / pitching chart.
- Two strike approaches
- Foot speed!

SECONDARY JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

- Every play requires some positive action from the outfielder.
- Anticipate all possible throwing lanes.
- Infield throws.
- Catcher throws.
- Pick-off attempts.
- Counterparts throws from the outfield.
- Bunt defense lanes.
- Rundowns – participate don't spectate.
- Cover any and all bases left uncovered by infielders.

GUIDELINES

- Understand the importance of defense.
- Be prepared every day both mentally and physically.
- Be early for early work.
- Listen to everything – apply the information and learn from others mistakes or mastery.
- Acquire the most out of every drill.
- Work to Win!

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FUNDAMENTAL CRITERIA FOR OUTFIELDERS

- Pre-ready and Ready Positions
 - Communication and positioning between pitches.
 - Consistency
- Jumps
 - Correct read on contact
 - Good cross over and drop steps
 - Stay low and explosive – good first step quickness.
- Routes
 - Good angles to all directions without drifting
- Range
 - Good range – raw speed works with all of above bullet points.
 - Bad range – when raw speed makes up for mistakes on above bullet points
- Hands
 - Good when they are soft and quick both on fly balls and groundballs.
- Throwing Mechanics
 - Does raw arm work with crow hop on fly ball?
 - Does raw arm work with crow hop on ground ball?
 - Accuracy and good carry will be as good as their throwing mechanics and crow hop.
- Footwork
 - Quick feet with correct mechanics is a must.
- Running Form
 - Good form will improve all of the above bullet points.
 - On the balls of your feet.
 - Must stay low.

OUTFIELD PLAY LEVELS OF PROGRESSION

It is very important for everyone to understand that most of the players coming into college baseball do not have an understanding of the fundamentals. Patience and a lot of communication are keys between coaches and the players. Take time to learn about the players, their background, attitudes, strengths, fears, etc. The more we learn about our players and the more they learn about us, the more trust they will have in our ability to teach. Teach good work habits, sound fundamentals and keep it simple.

LEVEL ONE

- Introduction to running, conditioning, and weight training program (introduction to proper warm- up routine).
- Knowledge of the game - take time daily to talk about game situations. Keep it simple.
- Communication between players.
- CF has priority over LF and RF. Outfielders have priority over infielders.
- Communication between staff and players - review signs for gap situations, keeping double play in order, positioning, etc.
- Back up bases on double plays, runners stealing, balls hit to the infield, and rundowns.
- Positioning
- Game situations
- Playing field size
- Hitter
- Hitting count
- Pitchers' stuff
- Weather conditions (wind, sun, fast outfield, wet ground, hard ground, etc.)
- Who is running
- Pre-ready position and ready position (proper technique will help jumps, routes and range)
- Pre-ready positions – outfielders must make sure among each other that they position themselves right, know
- How many outs and know what to do with the ball before getting into their ready position.
- Ready position- it varies from player to player. However, it should be keep about the same at this level to create consistency.
- Semi crouch (athletic position) -player should have weight on the ball of feet, feet should be slightly outside shoulder width and hands off the knees as the ball is crossing the plate. Staying relaxed and low is a must for first step quickness and explosiveness. Best place to work of this is during B.P.
- Jumps and routes.
- Cross over step (used on balls to OF's right or left).
- Drop step on angles and straight over the head (used on balls going back).
- First step coming in on line drives of soft fly balls.
- Catching fly balls.
- Without runners on or two outs (two hands if camped under it, one hand if running full speed or stretching and extending to make the catch).
- With two hands, get in a habit of catching the ball coming into the glove and not away from it.
- With runners in scoring position or advancing with less than two outs. Give enough room to catch the ball coming in the direction towards the cut-off man with enough momentum to get good carry on the ball (must crow-hop).
- On fly balls going into the fence with time to find the fence, and then catch the ball.
- Playing the ball off the fence when it bounces back or is deadened. If the ball is dead, square the feet towards the cut – off with the ball in the middle area of the body within easy reach making sure of a good grip, crow-hop, and hit the cut-off man in the chest.

- Do not try to look for the cut-off man before you have the ball.
- Catching ground balls.
- Without runners on- routine ground balls. Outfielders must be infielders in the outfield when it comes to routine ground balls. Center ball in front, legs spread, butt down, bent knees.
- After catching the ball, crow-hop and get the ball in as soon as possible.
- With runners in scoring position- Get momentum and line the body towards the cut-off man. Stay low, with bent knees and get under control when getting close to the ball. Catch the ball outside and in front of glove side feet, bring glove up, exchange and square shoulders and feet towards cut-off man using glove as guide and follow through with body.
- Cutting ground balls off in the gaps or on the foul lines – Stay low and get to the ball as soon as possible. If you have to get extended, use either forehand or backhand. Get under control, use crow-hop and get the ball in. The longer the outfielder takes to cut off the ball, the more steps the runner will take.
- Throwing - work on grip (four seams).
- Arm action (long, but quick).
- How to get arm loose at all times (starting day, before infield, during game, between innings, etc).
- Must learn how to crow-hop.
- Work to develop arm strength and durability.
- Always make firm throws to the cut-off man and learn when to save your arm.
- Work on accuracy.
- Do not throw behind runners.
- Hands -work on soft hands and quick hands.
- Footwork- work on quick feet, coordination and control, especially on the crow-hop.
- Staying low and not drifting is a must – staying low and not drifting are the most important aspects of an outfielder's speed, range, agility, control, coordination, first step quickness and ability to make adjustments to the ball.
- As instructors, we must make sure that all outfielders understand what staying low and not drifting means.
- We should not take for granted that they understand, especially at the lower levels.

LEVEL TWO

- Maturity and professionalism on and off the field of play is important to implement at this level of play.
- Players must have a good idea of self-evaluation, mental preparation, fundamentals, and knowledge of the game.
- Continue to stress the importance of communication.
- Develop better understanding of positioning, taking into consideration opponents strengths, weaknesses, and the pitcher's stuff.
- Consistent approach to outfielder's ready position.
- Consistency on jumps and reads on contact.
- Develop proper and consistent techniques on catching fly balls, ground balls, exchanges, throwing mechanics, footwork, and crow-hops.

- Continue to re-enforce the importance of good work habits.

LEVEL THREE

- Must have a complete understanding of outfield play.
- Should have knowledge of the game and proper approach to each individual situation.
- Mental approach, toughness, and preparation on a daily basis will be stressed at this level.

OUTFIELD DRILLS

- Zap Drill
 - The objective is to recapture poise after wrong first step or read off the bat.
 - An outfielder should always use his head to change direction, never his lower body.
 - The drill concentrates on zapping a head from left to right or right to left without forfeiting ground.
 - Each outfielder along with a ball goes one at a time.
 - Outfielder flips ball to coach and proceeds full speed for twenty yards away from the coach.
 - At twenty yards he zaps his head to find the ball.
 - The coach should throw the ball over the opposite shoulder.
 - Outfielder zaps head to opposite side without relinquishing speed.
 - Catch the ball!
- Stride Drill
 - After all have done the zap drill, the stride drill begins.
 - Outfielder tosses the ball back and begins to run towards the coach.
 - The objective is keeping the outfielders on the tips of their toes to eliminate any head movement.
 - The stride part simulates coming in to catch a ball.
 - When an outfielder runs toe-hell the head bounces.
 - Staying on ones toes when running in pursuit of a fly ball safeguards against wobbly vision.
 - Catching the highest point is fundamental.
 - Do not panic!
- Line to Line
 - This drill enhances the Stride drill.
 - Group the outfielders and position them anywhere in the outfield.
 - One at a time, each outfielder starts running across the outfield towards a foul line.
 - The fungo hitter attempts to lead the outfielder with a fly ball.
 - The objective is to force the outfielder to run a lengthy distance, stay on his toes and maintain a steadfast head position and vision.
 - Finish the play by CATCHING THE BALL.
 - When all have gone, start again working both directions (left and right).
 - Usually outfielders are stronger to their left or to their right; it is necessary to master both routes.

- Remember, an outfielder should always strive for proper fly ball mechanics: working the feet and body to a spot, feet secured under ball and catching the ball at the highest point.
- NODRIFTING!
- Blind Zap
 - Group outfielders together.
 - Go one at a time, starting with back to fungo hitter.
 - On the sound of contact outfielder zaps head and body around practicing proper fly ball techniques on all balls and finishes the play.
 - The objective is to develop poise during the process of picking the ball up in flight.
 - An outfielder must roam the outfield with his head down.
 - It is impossible to watch the flight of the ball and run one's fastest.
 - Outfielders must have the ability to recover the ball after taking his eyes off the ball.
 - This technique is employed for balls that are well hit – gaps, warning track, etc.
- Live Balls
 - Without any question this is the most important drill for our outfielders.
 - For one entire group or 15 minutes per day of balls off the live bat during batting practice.
 - Keep the pitchers on warning track, away from the outfielders.
 - This is NOT a social hour.
 - The objective is to create a game atmosphere.
 - All phases of outfield play are practiced.
 - Off side outfielder takes a minimum of 3 power strides to the ball (i.e. ball hit to the LF, the rightfielder explodes 3 power strides to his right).
 - Jumps and reads are the key to solid outfield play.
 - Balls live off the bat address these important elements.
 - Concentration, maximum effort, and production are ingredients for success during this drill.
- Corner Drills
 - The objective is to handle balls hit into the right field and left field corners, and the right and left field gaps.
 - This is a productive drill at home and especially on the road.
 - Take the outfielders to their respective positions.
 - The fungo hitter's station should be 50-75 feet from the corner on the foul line or in the gap.
 - Fungo balls off the wall – on the ground or in the air – until outfielders are proficient at reading the trajectory of the ball.
 - All ballparks are different.
 - This is invaluable information during a game – especially with the bases loaded and you're up by two, late in the game.
- FENCE DRILLS
 - "Face your Fears."
 - The outfield fence or wall is an issue.

- The objective of this drill is creating boldness when encountering the fence/wall.
 - An accurate read is important.
 - Outfielders need to distinguish catchable balls and balls to be played off the fence/wall.
 - Set up a machine or fungo hitter behind SS or 2B.
 - Send balls off, over and headed for the fence/wall.
 - The proper technique is putting the head down and getting to the fence/wall.
 - NEVER leave a space between the player and the fence/wall.
 - Outfielders can always come back but it is very troublesome to stop and attempt to gain more depth.
 - When the outfielder arrives at the fence/wall, his throwing hand finds the fence and he zaps his head to locate the flight of the ball.
 - BACK-UP TEAMMATES!
- Communication Drill
 - Split outfielders into two groups.
 - Use a fungo or a machine and attempt to split the difference between the players with a fly ball or ground ball.
 - The outfielder with the better angle or jump calls off the other to solidify an out.
 - Loud, early and decisive communication is important.
 - The emphasis of this drill is making the outfielders work into throwing position and having the outfielder with the most productive angle prevail.
- First Step Quickness Drill
 - The objective is to have a short 1st step, then explode to the ball on a direct line. Remember-short, then quick.
 - Take one outfielder and have him go in these directions:
 - Straight in
 - In to his left and right
 - Straight across to his left and right
 - Straight back
 - Back to his left
 - Right with a drop step
 - Finish up with opposite turn; go straight back and to his left and right.
 - Throw the ball opposite of the way he starts off.
 - Make sure they run a direct line to the ball.
- Short Fungos
 - Players are facing the fungo hitter approximately 20 to 30 feet away.
 - Fungo hitter attempts to hit easy line drives to the player.
 - This will assist in a variety of balls hit.
 - This variety will assist the player in the development of "first step quickness" with the player reading the ball first.
 - Read steps, and first step quickness will be improved.