



ESSENTIAL SOFTBALL

BASERUNNING DRILLS

15 Fundamental Drills
for Youth Softball

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INTRODUCTION

Baserunning is an often overlooked aspect of softball that can nonetheless have a significant impact on your team's ability to win games.

Teams that are good on the basepaths will be able to manufacture runs and take better advantage of what the defense gives them.

On the other hand, teams that are bad on the basepaths will run themselves into outs and give up runs that they should have scored. This can be demoralizing to a team, especially its pitchers who may feel like they have to be perfect to make up for their team's poor offensive skills.

To improve your teams baserunning, practice the drills included in this guide regularly.

With consistent practice you can turn even the most inexperienced players into knowledgeable, talented baserunners who are able to take the extra base and take full advantage of defensive errors.

When you have a team full of players like that your scoring totals will soar. Now let's get started!

DRILL #1 – SLIDE TO THE BAG DRILL

Skill Level: Beginner

Purpose:

Players learn to slide into the bag to beat a tag out play.

Setup:

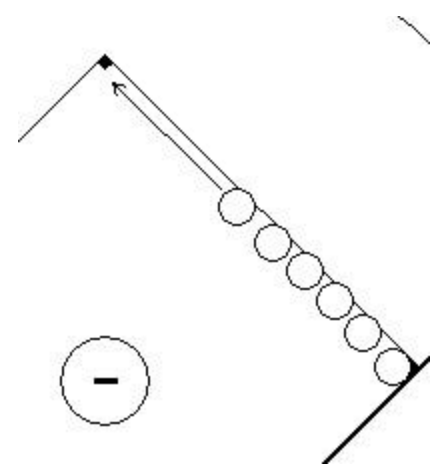
You can set up a couple stations for this drill, each with a line of players and a bag that they are going to slide into.

Execution:

1. Before running this drill, instruct players on proper sliding technique, which is: the player should create a triangle with the legs, and then slide using the leg underneath, with the top foot free to touch the bag.
2. Teach players not to go directly on their bottom (it will hurt a bit), but to focus on sliding in with the backside of their thigh.
3. In this drill players take turns running and sliding into the bag.

Coaching Tips:

- Once players can master the sliding technique, you can take it one step further and show them what situations they should slide in.
- Later on, you can add players trying to tag the runner out if you like.
- If you have players that are first learning this drill, you might want to try it out in the outfield to work on technique, before you move to the infield.



Players work on proper sliding technique.

DRILL #2 – HEAD FIRST SLIDE

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Players learn to slide head first into the bag.

Setup:

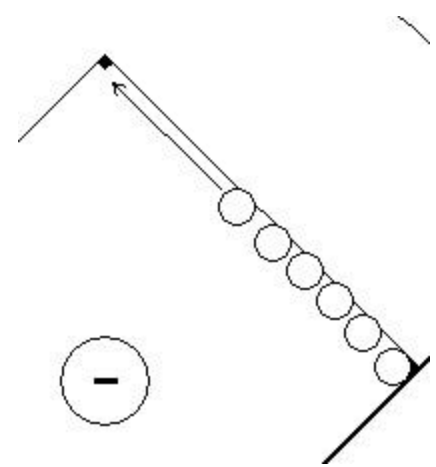
You can set up a couple stations for this drill, each with a line of players and a bag that they are going to slide into.

Execution:

1. You can run it the same as DRILL #1, except of course, the players will be going head first to the bag, instead of foot first.
2. There is one major advantage to sliding head first, and that is reaching for the back corner of the bag. This should be one of the major elements taught to the player. This move will allow the baserunner to try and avoid the tag from the defender, who will normally guard the front of the bag.
3. Players should also be taught to slide properly: ease into the slide (don't jump up and land on the chest, this will knock the wind out of them), make the slide an extension of their running to the bag, not a completely separate motion and they should begin a head first slide about 2 strides away from the bag (6 to 8 feet).

Coaching Tips:

- Players may have a hard time nailing down the proper technique for sliding, and this can cause unnecessary pain to the ankle, knee and the behind, so learning good technique on the grass is probably the best way to go to start. Once a player becomes more confident with their slide, then you can move to the shale infield.



Set up like the previous drill only players now slide head first into the bag instead of feet first.

DRILL #3 – CRACK THE BAT

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Players learn to get the right lead off and then take off to the next base when the ball is hit.

Setup:

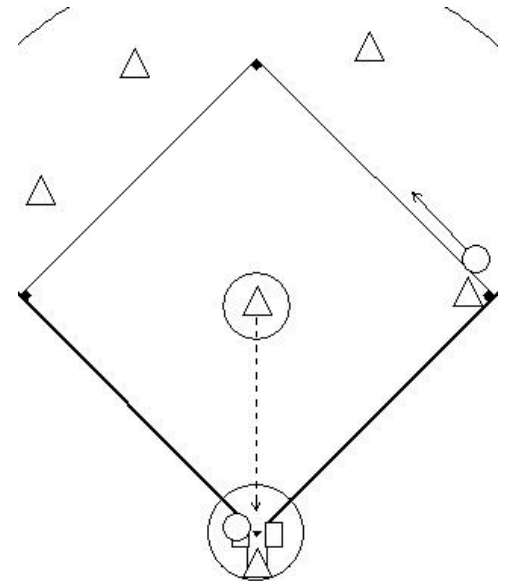
A runner on first base, a pitcher, batter and a full infield.

Execution:

1. The runner should lead off, and be ready to spring into action when the ball is hit.
2. The runner will get one point for leaving right at the crack of the bat, zero points for leaving early and the hitter making contact, minus one point if they are caught leaving too late after the ball is struck, and minus two points if they leave too early and the batter misses the ball, and they are left running to second, which should be an easy out for the defense.

Coaching Tips:

- Although not stealing, the player on first wants to get a good jump, without it seeming like a hit and run. Look for explosiveness, anticipation and good reaction time from the baserunner.



The runner looks to get a good jump and be off and running with the crack of the bat in this drill.

DRILL #4 – WATCH THE BASE COACHES

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Develops good communication between base coaches and players, which in turn will reduce the number of outs that occur because of bad baserunning.

Setup:

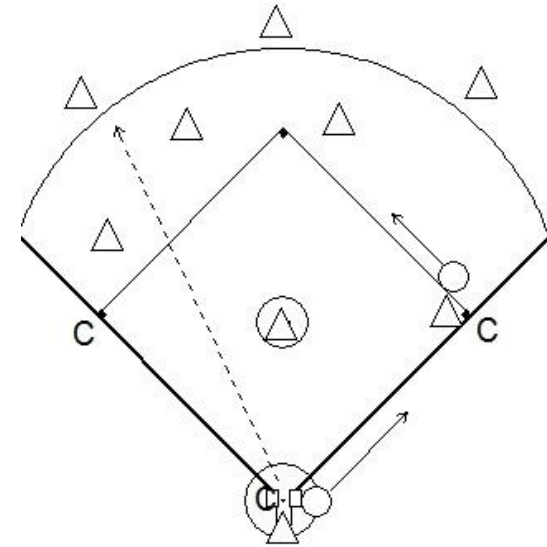
A full infield and outfield, a couple of runners, and a first and third base coach.

Execution:

1. Have the coach hit the ball to certain areas of the field and the players need to make the plays.
2. Once runners reach base, the coaches need to instruct them on what to do. For example, if the coach hits a shallow fly ball to right field, he or she will instruct the runner to take a slight lead and just as the ball is caught, tag up at first and wait to see if they should run.
3. The coach will go through many different scenarios in this drill to make sure that the runners and the base coaches are on the same page.

Coaching Tips:

- Make sure players are watching the base coaches and following their instructions.



Baserunners must pick up their base coaches in order to know whether to advance or not in this communication-building drill.

DRILL #5 – SQUEEZE PLAY

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Players learn to execute the squeeze play – a valuable play to be able to execute, especially when a team expects you to try to score a run on a sacrifice fly ball.

Setup:

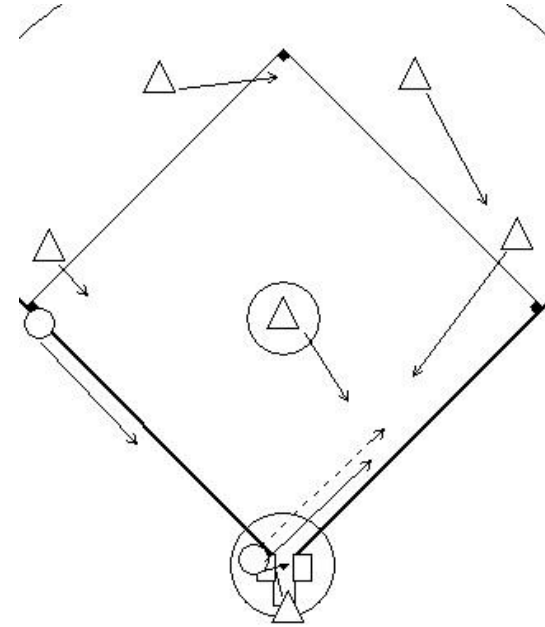
Full infield including pitcher and catcher, batter and a runner on third.

Execution:

1. The bunter tries to put the ball into play at least 10 to 12 feet from the catcher.
2. By the time anyone reacts, the player at third base should be well on his or her way home.

Coaching Tips:

- The runner on third has to get a good jump on the pitcher as the batter squares around to bunt the ball.
- The bunt is probably the most important thing in this drill, because in order for the runner not to easily get tagged out at home, the batter must make contact with the ball and get it into play.



Batter attempts to bunt the runner home from third.

DRILL #6 – SACRIFICE PLAY

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Baserunners attempt to advance on a sacrifice bunt or fly ball.

Setup:

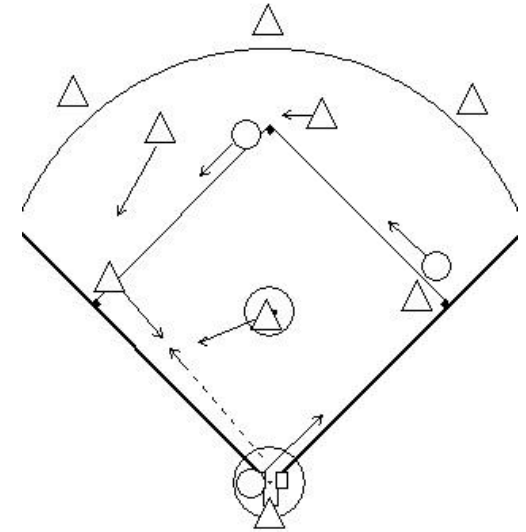
A full infield and outfield, a batter and a runner on first, second or third.

Execution:

1. The batter must get the runner to the next base, but only using one of two plays: a bunt or a sac fly.
2. The fly ball must be deep enough to advance the runner and the bunt needs to be effective enough not to be a double play ball.

Coaching Tips:

- Runners should work on getting good leads and a quick jump on a bunt or a good tagup on a fly ball.
- Batters should work on hitting a fly ball on purpose and also bunting to the best areas to avoid outs.



Baserunners must be alert and get good jumps to increase the likelihood that a sacrifice play works.

DRILL #7 – DOUBLE STEAL

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Runners on two different bases both try to advance.

Setup:

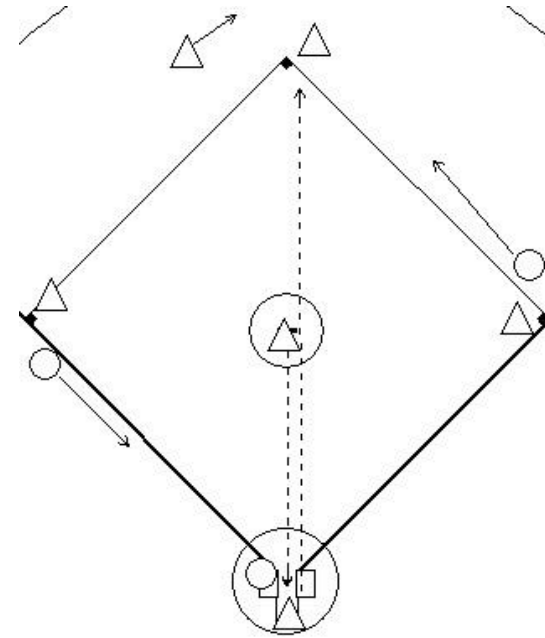
A full infield, a batter, a runner on first, and a runner on second or third.

Execution:

1. The pitcher will go through his or her normal delivery and the batter will just swing at the ball and not hit it.
2. The runners will attempt to steal two bases.
3. From first and third, the runner on first will advance to second in hopes the throw goes there and the third base runner can advance home.
4. From first and second, the hope is that both runners can advance at the same time.
5. The offense competes against the defense in this one – if the defense gets the lead runner, it's two points, the second runner, one point.
6. If the offense executes the double steal, they get two points.

Coaching Tips:

- The coach can alter the timing of the double steal, having both players leave at the same time or staggering them.



Offense executes a double steal with runners on first and third.

DRILL #8 – FEET FIRST, HEAD FIRST

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Reinforces good sliding technique.

Setup:

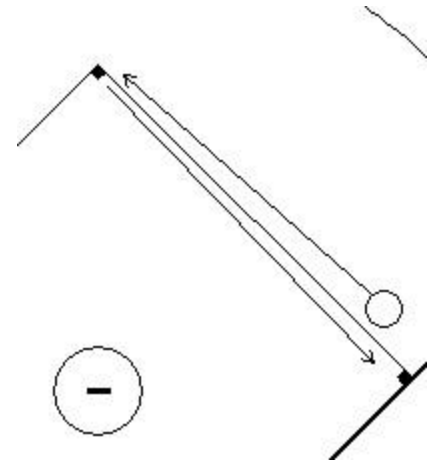
You can either set this drill up in the infield with the regular bags, or, if you just want to work on technique with this drill, then you can set up any number of bases in the outfield. Set up a station that has two bases, and divide the players among the stations.

Execution:

1. Each player in the station will do the drill, and they will first run to the base ahead of them and slide into it feet first with the proper technique (lead leg extended and trailing leg folded at a right angle at the lead leg knee).
2. Then, they will get up and they will turn around and sprint to the base prior and they will execute a head first slide (lead arm reaching for the outside corner of the base).

Coaching Tips:

- You can run this drill in the infield as the player goes around the bases. To make it slightly more complex, you can have the catcher trying to throw the player out at each base.



Above, runner slides feet first into second and then gets up and returns to first where she slides head first back into the bag.

DRILL #9 – DIRT BALL

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

This drill teaches players to react to a bad pitch when they are on base.

Setup:

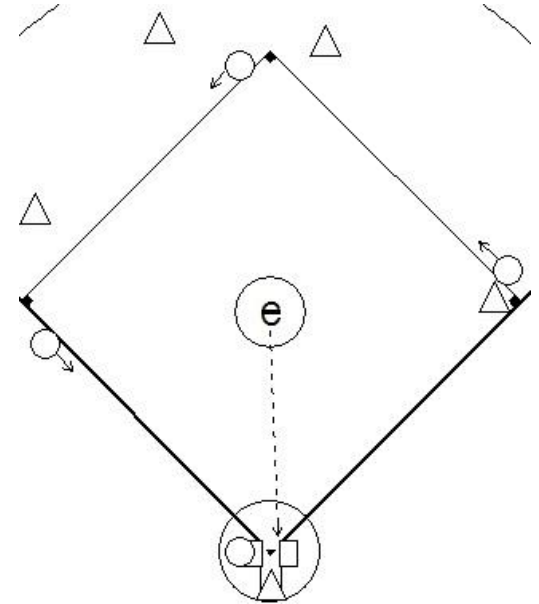
Put runners on all three bases. The coach will be on the pitching mound.

Execution:

1. Each base runner reacts differently when the pitcher throws the ball to home plate. The runners need to read the way the ball is approaching the plate in order to get the best jump on a possible passed ball.
2. At first base, the runner should go if the ball is in the dirt.
3. On second base, the runner needs to take a good lead, and then decide if they can make it to third. If the ball gets past the catcher, then they should be on their way.
4. On third, the only way the runner should go is if the ball gets past the catcher.

Coaching Tips:

- When the ball is pitched in the dirt, the entire team should shout out “DIRT”.



Baserunners learn when to advance on balls in the dirt.

DRILL #10 – TENNIS BALL DROP

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Baserunner works on reaction time and getting a good jump when stealing.

Setup:

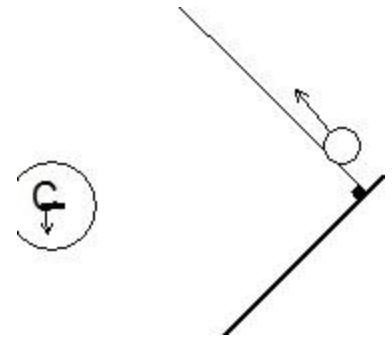
You need a runner at first and a player or coach on the pitcher's mound with a tennis ball.

Execution:

1. Baserunner takes her lead.
2. Player or coach on mound gets set and then drops the tennis ball.
3. Upon seeing the drop of the ball, the baserunner immediately breaks for second.
4. Baserunner can go 10 feet, halfway or all the way to second depending on what the coach wants in this drill.

Coaching Tips:

- Player or coach on the mound should vary their release time so that the baserunner can't "time the pitch."



Baserunner works on getting a good jump for a steal attempt.

DRILL #11 – HOME TO SECOND

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Helps players learn to follow a tight, efficient path when running from home plate to second base.

Setup:

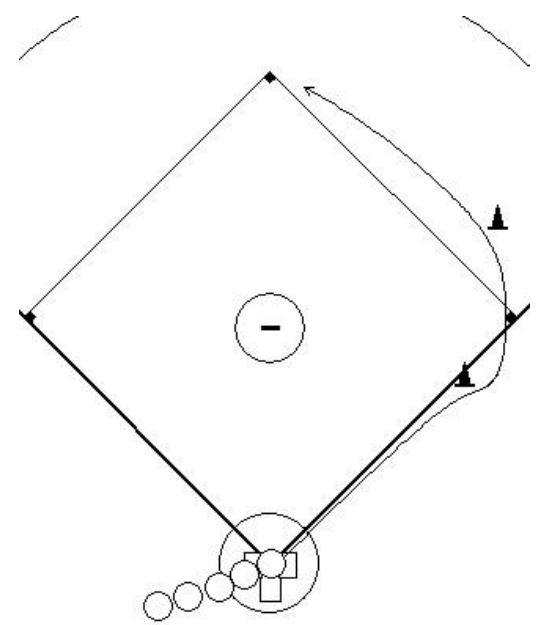
Place a cone outside the first base line to mark the angle of the player's turn. Then place a second cone about 10 feet from first base to set a boundary for the player's turn to second.

Execution:

1. Players line up at home plate.
2. Player 1 runs from home to first, angling out at the cone to make the turn.
3. Player then runs past first staying inside the second cone and proceeds to second base.
4. Next player continues the drill until everybody has gone.

Coaching Tips:

- Make sure players run a straight line toward first before angling at the cone – some players have a tendency to veer off the line.
- Players should be hitting the corner of the first base bag as they turn toward second.



Players learn how to make an efficient turn to second in this baserunning drill.

DRILL #12 – SECOND TO HOME

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Helps players learn to follow a tight, efficient path when running from second base to home plate.

Setup:

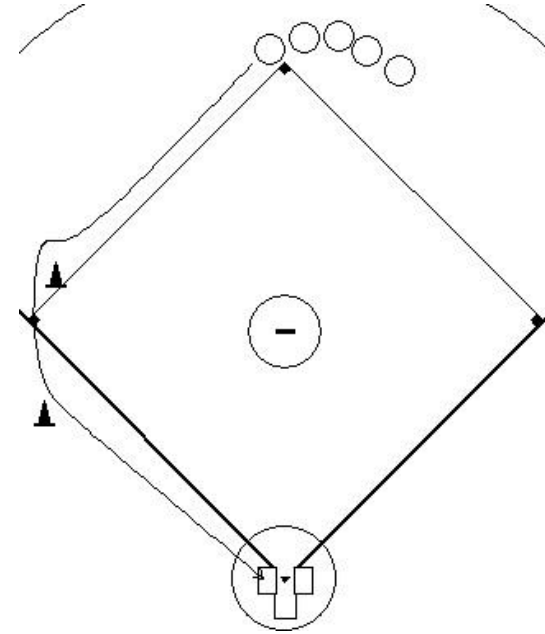
Place a cone near third base on the left field side to mark the angle of the player's turn. Then place a second cone about 10 feet from third base to set a boundary for the player's turn to home.

Execution:

1. Players line up at second base.
2. Player 1 runs from second to third, angling out at the cone to make the turn.
3. Player then runs around third staying inside the second cone and proceeds to home plate.
4. Next player continues the drill until everybody has gone.

Coaching Tips:

- Remember the shortest distance between two points is a straight line so make sure players run as straight as possible until they reach the first cone and angle out for the turn.
- Players should be hitting the corner of the third base bag as they turn toward home.



Players practice making a tight, speedy turn around third base.

DRILL #13 – RUNNERS AT THE CORNERS

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

This drill allows your players to work on a multitude of baserunning skills, including: running through first base and coming to a controlled stop; leading off from first and going to third on a hit; and tagging up at third and advancing home.

Setup:

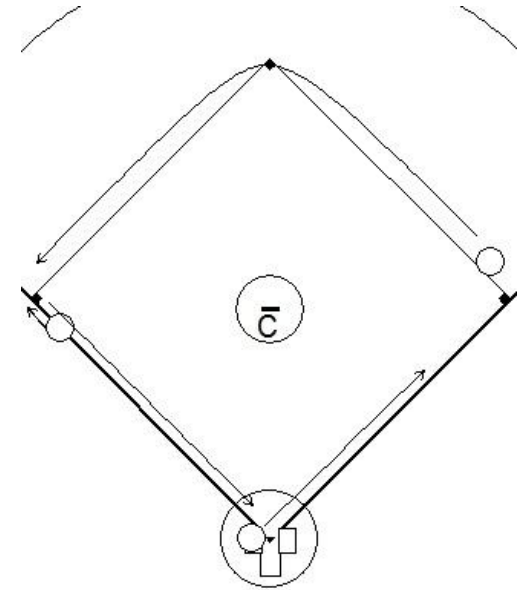
Put small groups of players at home, first and third. A coach or player stands on the mound.

Execution:

1. Coach or player on the mound comes set.
2. Players at first and third take their leads. Player at home steps into batter's box.
3. Coach or player on mound simulates a throw to the plate.
4. Runner at first takes off and goes to third using proper angles.
5. Runner at third, tags up and goes home.
6. Runner at home, runs to first, making the turn and proceeding back to the bag.
7. Players then go to the back of the lines at their new location.

Coaching Tips:

- Make sure players are getting good leads on first and third.
- Make sure player going first to third takes a good turn at second, not going out too wide. You can set up a cone if necessary to show runners where to go.



Players practice leads, tag ups and turns in this drill.

DRILL #14 – LEAD OFF DRILL

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Players practice their lead offs.

Setup:

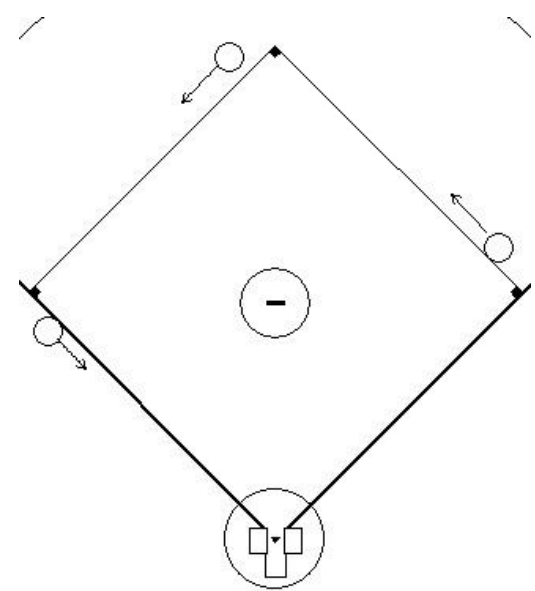
Put small groups of players at first, second and third. A coach or player stands on the mound.

Execution:

1. Coach or player on the mound comes set.
2. Players at each base take their leads.
3. Coach or player on mound either simulates a throw to the plate or actually makes the pitch.
4. Player runs to next base as if it were a hit or passed ball.
5. Drill proceeds with runner going home, going to the end of the line at first and other runners getting in line at the base they run to.

Coaching Tips:

- Make sure players are taking leads that are not too short or too long, that they are remaining balanced and that they are squaring up to the plate – except at third where they should square up to the pitcher. Also, watch their timing and make sure they are leaving when they should be.



Players practice taking a good lead.

DRILL #15 – RACE AROUND THE BASES

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Players learn to cut tight corners when rounding bases and make it to the next base as fast as possible.

Setup:

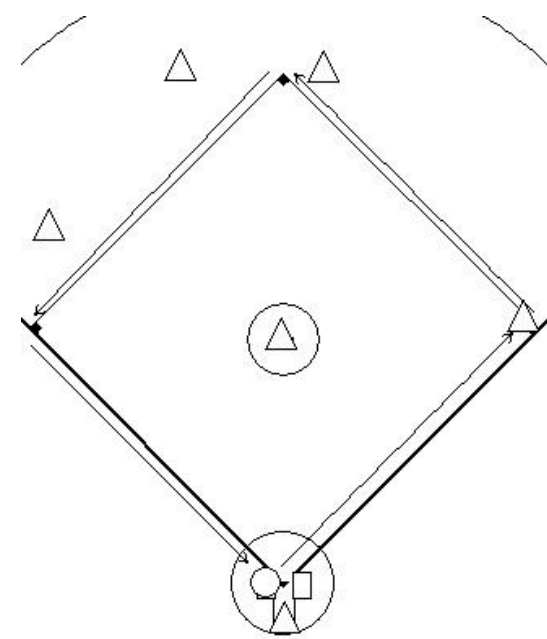
You need a full infield. The first runner stands at home plate.

Execution:

1. Player at home tosses the ball to herself and hits it.
2. She then runs around the bases.
3. The infielders field the ball and try to throw it around the horn to home before the runner gets there.

Coaching Tips:

- If you have older players, make them throw the ball to first each time (that means, field it, go to first, second, go to first, third, go to first, home) to make the race more competitive.



Players try to beat the ball back to home plate by running fast and taking a tight path around the bases.

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