

# CLINIC NOTES: GETTING SET

By Louis Berney and Bill Ripken

Regardless of what infield position a player is covering, he should approach the ground ball in the same way.

The most important thing is to be prepared for the ball. When the pitch is hitting the batter's zone, the fielder's feet should be comfortable and squared to home plate. His feet should be shoulder width apart. He can then move equally well to his left or right once the ball is hit.

As the ball is coming at him, he should remember three guidelines:

## GETTING SET

- Remain in that same wide base with feet shoulder-width apart; if the base is sufficiently wide, the body will be balanced. He must be sure he feels comfortable. The key word here is "comfortable" because what feels good for one player might not for another. Cal Ripken, for instance does not set up as wide as a base as his brother Bill.
- Keep the rear end down.
- As the rear goes down, be sure that the hands are out in front, so that he can keep his eyes on his hands and the ground ball at the same time. If his hands are farther back, he won't be able to track the ball as well.

While he is in this position, ready to catch the ball, he should keep his eyes down but not bury his head. He is fielding a baseball not snorkeling.

The use of both hands is important. But don't do the "gator," where he just snaps his throwing hand over the ball. The throwing hand should be around the glove, and it will close automatically as the ball hits the leather. If he tries the "gator" approach, his hand is in front of his face, and that's not where it should be.

For balls hit to his side, he will start again in the square position, then make a crossover step toward the ball. The key here is not to waste movement. If the ball is hit to his left, for instance, he should not first move the left foot—that's a wasted motion. Instead, he will cross over immediately with the right foot, toward the ball. Always pivot on his lead foot.

When moving to the side to field a ground ball, he must remember to set up behind the ball as described above, if he has time. He should never try to time a ground ball and just reach out for it. If he takes the approach of trying to anticipate and time where the ball will hop and it then takes a bad hop, he's lost—instead, he must get to the spot where the ball is going to be. This way, he'll be in a set, squared position, and in a better position to deal with a bad hop.

## BAD HOPS

Crazy hops are more difficult to field when he's moving. If he's in the set position, with his eyes on the ball and his hands in front of him, he often will be able to compensate for the bad hop and make the play. So, the quicker he gets into the set position behind the ball when it's hit to his left or right, the better off he'll be.

Playing a bad hop, like every other element of fielding, is easier if he's prepared for it and in a set position. With his rear down, his hands in front of his eyes which are looking down, he'll be surprised at how fast his hands can react to a bounce. It's essential to remember, though, that his hands must always be out in front - that gives them more range for quick movement if the ball takes an unexpected bounce.

## BACKHAND PLAYS

When the ball goes too far to his right for him to get squarely behind it, he will be forced to backhand it. Once again, preparation is the key. There is a common misconception about the backhand- some think he should backhand the ball when it's behind him. Don't try it! He should always backhand the ball when it's still in front of him. If he tries to glove it when it's behind him, he won't be able to keep his head straight and his eye on the ball.

On backhands, he should try to get down as close to the ground as he can. There are two ways he can position his feet on the backhand, and either one is acceptable. In fact, Cal and Bill Ripken each use their feet differently on the backhand, even though they still follow the same basic fundamentals for fielding the ball.

Cal crosses his left foot over his right so that his left foot is closest to the ball when he makes the backhand play. Bill, on the other hand, backhands the ball with his right foot out in front and closest to the ball.

There is room for individual differences, whether the task is playing a ground ball or swinging a bat. But the key is remember to accommodate those individual differences only after the player has put into play basic fundamentals.

Those basic fundamentals for fielding ground balls are getting in a squared and comfortable position, keeping the rear down and holding the glove and throwing hand out in front of him. The key to perfecting these fundamentals to the point where they come naturally to him is to have a coach or friend hit as many ground balls to him as possible. Even major leagues can never get too much practice at taking grounders.