

PLAY BASEBALL "THE RIPKIN WAY"

Tips from Bill Ripkin

Here are some suggestions for helping your players improve during the early part of your seasons.

Infield

It doesn't matter if you play first base, second base, shortstop, or third base, catching a ground ball can be done the same way. I like to teach three basic fundamentals:

- 1) Wide Base: Feet should be at LEAST shoulder-width apart. Wider is better!
- 2) Rear-end Down: The lower your "rear" is, the lower your head is and the farther you can get your hands out in front.
- 3) Hands Out in Front: If your hands are out front, you can see your glove and the ball at the same time.

First Base

When a ground ball is not hit to you, your No. 1 priority is to get to the first-base bag as quickly as possible. Once you get to the bag, the setup is important. A right handed first baseman sets up with his right foot on the bag. A left-handed first baseman sets up with his left foot on the bag. Square your shoulders toward the infielder who is throwing the ball, giving him a good target to throw to.

Outfield

Catching fly balls is probably listed as the No. 1 priority in your job description. Every outfielder may catch fly balls in a slightly different manner, but every player SHOULD catch the ball high - above the eye level. This allows you to see the glove and the ball at the same time. Catching the fly ball beside your ear or at chest level does not allow you to see the glove and the ball at the same time, no matter what you see from the big leaguers on television. And, there still is nothing wrong with using two hands to catch a fly ball.

Base Running

We've all hit two-hop ground balls to the shortstop. After hitting the ball, you still have to run to first base. You should pick out a spot beyond the base, allowing you to run through the bag at full speed and not just to the base. If you run through the bag, you actually have a better chance of eliminating the big lunge step into first base. Lunging actually slows you down and increases your chances of getting injured.

Pitchers

The fastball still is the best pitch in baseball. It develops arm strength and allows you to throw your other pitches better as you progress in your young careers. Pitchers in the Cal Ripken Division should throw 80 percent fastballs. You will not develop arm strength by throwing "junk" at an early age. By throwing fastballs and developing arm strength, your arm will be in better shape and less susceptible to injury.

Quotes from Cal Ripken, Sr.

Excerpts from "The Ripken Way," by Cal Ripken Sr. with Larry Burke

Baseball is just a walk of life. The thing that you do in life, you do in baseball, and the things that you do in baseball, you really do in life. Here's some important advice for a baseball player that can also be used by any person who wants to be successful in any walk of life:

Get a quick first step: If the first step is quick, the steps that follow will be likewise and quicker.

Play heads-up: We play baseball on the ground, not with it. You can't play this game with your head down.

Communicate: Verbal communication is essential on a baseball field. By talking we can make the catch on an in-between fly ball, rather than watching that ball fall for a base hit as we stand looking at one another.

Anticipate: First, everyone on the field should want the ball hit to them. In preparation we should say to ourselves, "What am I going to do with the ball when it's hit to me? To my right? To my left and slowly?" By doing this we're prepared to make the correct play at all times. Physical errors are going to happen, but we must keep mental errors to a bare minimum.

Adjust – and Readjust: There are so many variables in the game of baseball, which therefore necessitate constant adjustments. And it's not just those that have to do with the game itself. There's the cold, the heat, the wind, the sun, the mud, and so forth. The more you'll find the need to do both.

The Little Things

The game of baseball is made up of many little things. If we do all the little things right, then we'll never have a big thing to worry about.