

How to Play First Base (the Right Way)

by Olan Suddeth

This article - How to Play First Base (the Right Way) - is part of our "How to Play" series aimed at helping youth league coaches properly instruct their players on the fundamentals of each position.

Requirements for the First Baseman

Your first baseman must have an excellent glove, able to catch anything thrown near him. Speed is not much of a factor at this position, though the fielder still must be quick to move and react. He must be fearless, unafraid to stretch out and make a difficult catch or scoop while keeping his foot on the bag.

Many coaches try, with good reason to put a tall, left-handed player at first base. Tall, because the larger the player, the longer his reach, and the fewer balls he will miss due to a lack of physical size. Left handed, because you gain a tiny bit more reach at first base with a left handed fielder - giving you an extra call or two per year on close plays.

Basic Responsibilities

On any contact, the player should know whether the ball is coming in his general direction or not. If so, he should attempt to make the play, just as should any fielder. If not, he must cover the bag, whether or not he believes that there is any hope of a play at first base.

Advanced Responsibilities

First basemen must be taught that their primary responsibility, above all others, is to get the sure out. Naturally, they should be able to think fast and to get lead runners whenever possible - but it is always better to get that sure, easy out at first base than it is to take an unnecessary chance trying to get a lead runner elsewhere and come away empty handed.

On bloop hits, or on grounders that pull him far off of his bag, the first baseman should know when to tag the base himself and when to toss it to the covering pitcher (or second baseman).

In the event of a bunt, the first baseman will usually charge the ball, allowing the second baseman to field his bag. However, care must be applied, lest the batter pull back the bat and lay a grounder through the hole up the middle.

Once a play gets into the outfield, the first baseman should remain alert. It is always possible that a run down can occur, and he will need to either cover his base or back up a throw. The first baseman should always back up any throw coming in from left field to second base.

First base is always a center of action, and should be filled by one of the best gloves on your team. A team without a quality first baseman finds itself giving away outs on a routine basis.