

The Art of the Two Base Walk – Put Pressure on the Defense

by Olan Suddeth

If you have a talent-laden team that is head and shoulders better than the rest of your league, you may be able to simply sit back and bash the ball while on offense, and shut down opposing teams with your dominant pitching. The rest of the youth baseball teams out there, however, are looking for an edge in order to win. Manufacturing runs is always vitally important to the outcome of a game; scratching out an extra run can help you break out a big inning, and can make the difference in an otherwise close game.

The single best way to manufacture runs is by putting pressure on the defense. Put the ball in play, get runners on the bases, force the opposing fielders to make plays. Be aggressive and take advantage of mistakes.

What is the single most common mistake in youth baseball? It's when a pitcher issues a walk, of course. Seldom will a coach call for the pitcher to intentionally put a man on base. In leagues that allow stealing, the walk is an ideal low risk/high reward opportunity to put pressure on the defense.

Teach your batters that "walk" is a misnomer - instead, when they draw ball four, have them drop their bat and tear down the line at full speed, just as if they were trying to leg out an infield single. If second base is unoccupied, they should make their turn just as if they were looking to stretch a hit into a double.

Very frequently, even late in a season when they should know better, the opposing pitcher will hang his head when he walks a batter, and the opposing catcher will dawdle on getting the ball back to the mound. With no hit, infielders often mentally "check out" and do not pay attention. Due to these mental lapses, an aggressive runner can often reach second base without a throw.

If you have a runner on third, he should fire off as soon as ball four is called. The catcher will be almost forced to allow the batter to reach second base; if he throws in an attempt to hold the batter to first, your runner at third should immediately break for home and give you an easy run.

Likewise, any runner should be ready for a bad throw - quite often, the defense will belatedly realize what is going on and rush their play in an effort to stop you. A good portion of these rushed plays end up with balls in the outfield, allowing your runners to advance without danger. I have many times seen a batter score on a walk, due to poor defense.

The only real defense against this technique at the youth baseball level is a swift return from the catcher back to the pitcher who immediately steps on the rubber, thus holding the runners. Also, if the bases are clear, your runner will need to listen to the first base coach in the event that he needs to return to first - we want to put pressure on the defense, not give away outs! Of course, if you do have a runner at third, the worst case scenario for you is probably that both of your runners will be in scoring position, and any threat of a double play is eliminated.

Be warned: some coaches consider such aggressive base running to be unsportsmanlike, and will complain loudly about it. However, this technique is perfectly legal in almost any league that allows stealing. If they don't want your guys running wild, they need to always be on their toes.

Liberal use of the two base walk will put pressure on the defense, and give your team momentum (not to mention an extra run here and there).