

Throwing Relay Race

by Olan Suddeth

In baseball, we tend to emphasize - as we should - the need to get rid of the ball quickly. Of course, that doesn't do us any good if the throws aren't good, or the other guy drops it. Use this little drill as a competition to practice good throws and good catches.

Start by splitting your team into two or three squads. If possible, have the same number of players on each squad, and certainly make sure to spread the talent out as equally as possible. Have each squad form a line, with a gap between each player roughly equivalent to the gap between the second baseman and first baseman on your infield. Have the first player pick up one ball, make a good throw to the next guy, then have him turn and throw it to the third player in line, and so on. You also want to emphasize throwing to the next player's glove rather than the center of their body. This drives home the basic principal that the fielder should always turn to the glove side of their body for the relay throw regardless of whether they are right or left handed. This is an important part of the drill that many new coaches neglect. Also, have your coaches help watch each line to make sure they are always turning towards their glove side. If they turn to the wrong side, correct them. This will pay off big in the long run.

After they've done the drill a time or two, place three balls on the ground at the end of each line. When you give the signal, the race begins - the object is to move each ball to the end of the line. If a player misses the ball, due to a bad throw or a muffed catch, he must return to his place in line before throwing it again. Once the first ball reaches the end of the line, the second ball may be put into play. The winning team is obviously the one who finishes first - have the losers do ten jumping jacks.

Vary the competition by allowing the players to have all balls in play at once, but don't let them get carried away and whack one another in the head in a rush to win. For another twist, you could require any dropped balls to be carried back to the beginning of the line - really emphasizing the need for a good throw. For more advanced fielders, use only one ball having the relay go down the line then back up the line and so on. Set the number times before the race you'd like to cycle through the line. Make sure to rotate the two fielders at both ends of the lines every other time since the last fielder in the line will not have to turn after throwing and/or catching. Of course, you can always make the drill more challenging by increasing the gaps between the players, but don't let them get so far apart as to make the throws too difficult for your lesser-skilled players; this defeats the purpose entirely.