

## **Why Do Kids Hate Playing Outfield?**

by Chip Lemin

Yes, as youth baseball coaches we have to overcome an unfair stigma that outfield is where we hide less skilled players during a game. To some extent that is correct. In youth baseball leagues under 10 years old, there are fewer balls hit into the outfield. When a player catches a fly ball in the outfield, it is an exciting and uplifting play for the team, more than a routine grounder can provide.

As youth baseball coaches, we must build up playing outfield as very important, because it is. From the first day in practice, we should talk about the importance of how good outfield play can change the outcome of a game. We can also mention how good play in the outfield can shut down the momentum of the other team.

But when the outfielders are not given positive feedback for doing little hustle things, like backing up of bases, or other players, they can lose focus and just stand in their positions doing nothing. When one of my best players, who had been put in outfield for couple innings during a game told me, "I like outfield all you do is stand there". I just shook my head, and thought about what the player had said.

The misconception that all you do is stand there is reinforced by many coaches. They ignore outfielders until a mistake is made then they yell out at the player "What happened?", or "What did you do that for?" Then they go right back to ignoring the outfield positions again.

Keeping one coach watching outfielders in youth baseball is a big help. Perhaps it could be rotated among the coaching staff. A good youth baseball coach can keep players in the game by heaping on praise for being ready, proper fielding position, and for hustling to back up on all throws of other fielders. Positive reinforcement will go all long ways towards improving your team's overall outfield play.

Outfielders will need to be praised often to keep them ready to make an important play. This is especially true in younger age groups. Try rotating the outfield positions if possible to keep interest in the players. Let them know that on every pitch they can still get into the ready position, and creep in three steps just like the infielders do.

So remember to pay more attention to your outfielders this year, and heap on the praise, especially for hustle. Outfield is the most underrated position in youth baseball. A good outfield is an additional weapon that can be used to win baseball games. This will not happen overnight. It must start from the first day of practice. So start planning additional outfield drills now for your spring practices, and make a good outfield one of your priorities.