

Run Down Drill

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Rundowns probably get botched more than any other team fundamental in baseball. This is true at all levels of the game.

When we were kids, it seemed like most of the time we could play a game of “pickle” and throw the ball back and forth until the runner got tired and then easily tag him or her out. But occasionally we’d run into an athlete who was quick enough to make it to base safely most of the time. Well, as you move up the ladder in baseball, you run into more and more of these athletes, which is why the rundown must be executed properly in as few throws as possible. The problem with the rundown at the youth levels up through high school is that we tend to complicate things for the kids. We try to talk to them about rotations and who should go where before they have mastered the simple fundamentals necessary to execute the play. It doesn’t matter if the pitcher knows that he or she should follow the throw after a pickoff at first base or that the first baseman knows to back up second base after making a throw to second if the simple components of the rundown have not been mastered. That’s where this drill comes into play.

Before talking to your team about who goes where when a runner gets hung up between a particular base, divide your infielders evenly between two bases, use your outfielders as runners and teach them all how to execute the rundown properly.

The Set-up

Divide all of your infielders, including catchers, sending half to first base and half to second base. Have a group of outfielders or other position players serve as runners at first base. The first runner should simulate taking a big lead at first base. The first player in the first base line has the ball. The first player in the second base line should start five or six feet in front of the bag, with the other players lined up behind the base toward left field.

The Execution

The goal of this drill is to execute a rundown properly by tagging each runner out using as few throws as possible. This is not the time to talk about positioning or making a throw to set up the rundown when a runner is picked off and takes off at full speed right away. The fielder with the ball wants to force the runner to run at full speed toward the next base before making a throw. The runner starts off with a bigger lead than normal at first base. The first player in line at first base has a ball. The coach says, “Go,” and the player with the ball runs toward the runner. As the runner is moving toward second, the first player in line at second walks slowly toward him or her. When the runner gets to full speed, the player at second steps forward and call for the ball, yelling “now” or “ball.” If the timing is right, the player at second should catch the ball moving toward the runner so that it is impossible for the runner to turn around and run back to first without being tagged. If the runner is able to change directions and runs back toward first, the next player in line at first steps up in front of the base and walks slowly toward the runner. The player at second who now has the ball tries to get the runner moving at full speed back toward first. The player who made the initial throw gets out of the baseline and runs to the end on the second base line. When the runner gets to full speed, the player at first steps forward and calls for the ball. This process repeats itself until the runner is tagged out.

Points of Emphasis

It is important to emphasize the following points when teaching the rundown:

- The person with the ball runs directly toward the runner with the ball held high in the bare hand.
- There is no pump-faking. Pump-faking makes it more difficult for the player receiving the throw to know when the ball is coming.
- The receiver should present a target so that the player with the ball can move inside or outside of the baseline and make a throw without hitting the runner. For example, a right-handed player will present a target on the outside of the baseline, and the player with the ball will run slightly to that side so that the throw can be made directly to the glove without going through the runner.
- The player receiving the throw does not call for the ball until the runner is at full speed.
- The throw is a quick toss or flip, much like throwing a dart.
- After the throw is made, the player making the throw gets out of the baseline and runs around to the end of the next line. Usually the player runs toward the outfield side of the baseline unless the player receiving the throw is left-handed.
- The player receiving the throw steps forward while calling for the ball.
- A perfect rundown consists of only one throw.

Variations

This drill can be set up between any two bases. If you have a large group of infielders and more than one coach, the drill can be run between two different sets of bases at the same time.

Once your infielders have perfected the fundamentals of the rundown, you can stage real game situations and place the players at their actual positions. The most common situations to practice are runners getting picked off at first or second and runners getting hung up between second and third or third and home on a ground ball to the pitcher.