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Hi, I'm Coach Jeff Mercer. Welcome to our hitting workout. Comprehensive hitting workout, complete with drills, fundamentals, and techniques that you need to become the complete hitter, along with game situations and things that are going to help you become a better hitter in a ballgame.

First six portions of the hitting workout, I'm going to ask that you keep in order. It's important that we do them this way because we're going to start from the ground up and work our way through to a normal stroke, the one that you're going to need as you move into your game situations.



The first one that Ryan's going to help me with is a bat behind the back. Hitting begins below the waist and if we can get our lower half started and keep our upper body intact, we've got a great chance not only to take a level swing, but to hit the ball hard as well. Notice that Ryan's going to start with a bat behind the back. I want him to spread his feet at least shoulder-width apart. He's on his belt line.

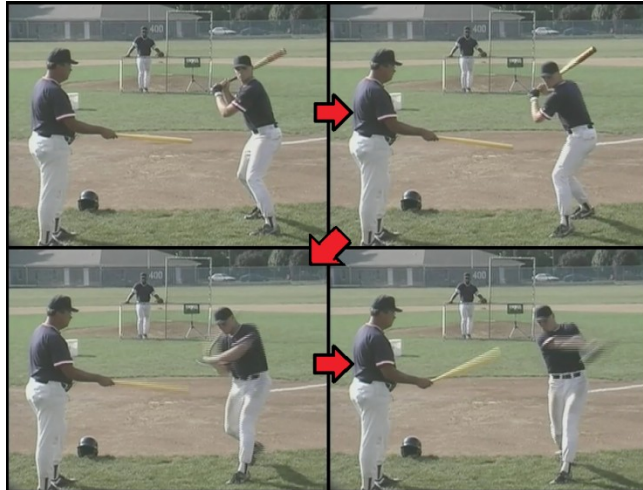
We don't want to put the bat in the elbow here. I see this done a lot, with the bat in the elbow, and it really doesn't help us because we can't pull. I want one hand at one end of the bat and the other hand at the other end, and we're going to pull hard in just an instant. This is going to ensure that we get good lower body rotation.

Okay, Ryan, we're going to do this in two parts. Part number one, we're going to get a little bit of movement backward and we're going to take our stride. And we call an inward turn and a stride. And this needs to be separate from part two. Part two is going to involve rotating the hips through, rolling the back foot up. We call that squishing a bug.

Okay, part number one again. Inward turn. Stride. Part two. Roll the back foot, and at the same time we're going to pull hard with the hand in the back here. Notice how the chest faces you. Okay? Back up. Let's go again. Ready? One. Two. Pull hard. Okay, back up. Full speed. Ready? One. Two. Good. Notice how I keep them separate. Part one and part two kept separate. We need 15 repetitions of the bat behind the back before you begin anything else.

You may have noticed before that I was holding a Wiffle bat. This is one of my favorite props in working with hitters. It's our opportunity to give our hitters a clue as to how fast their bat's moving. I used to use an old cane. I'd take a piece of white tape and wrap it around the end of a cane.

The problem was I had hitters that were catching up to me, knocking the white tape off and at the same time sending cane shrapnel all over the field. I thought it was probably a good idea to stop that and pick this up. This is the best thing I've found. You can get these anywhere. I'm sure at a local discount store or something. You probably played with them when you were kids or you're still playing with them. Maybe. Just like I am.



Okay, what I'm going to ask Ryan to do is to go ahead and get in his stance. And I'm going to move out in front of him a little bit and I'm going to hold the bat right here. Now what I'm going to ask Ryan to do is this. He can go ahead and start into his swing. As he gets to the point where his hands have come forward, as he's beginning to make his stroke, I can move the bat.

Now what I'm going to ask Ryan to do is not try to cheat. I want him to be quick enough from his stance into his swing to

be able to catch up to my Wiffle bat before I can move it. And if he can do that, he's moving the bat in a hurry. Here we go.

Now this gives Ryan something to shoot at. If you just walk up to a hitter and say, "Ryan, swing the bat hard." Well, what's "hard"? Hard to Ryan may not be hard to someone else. This gives them a solid idea of how fast you have to move. You've got to move fast enough to beat me.

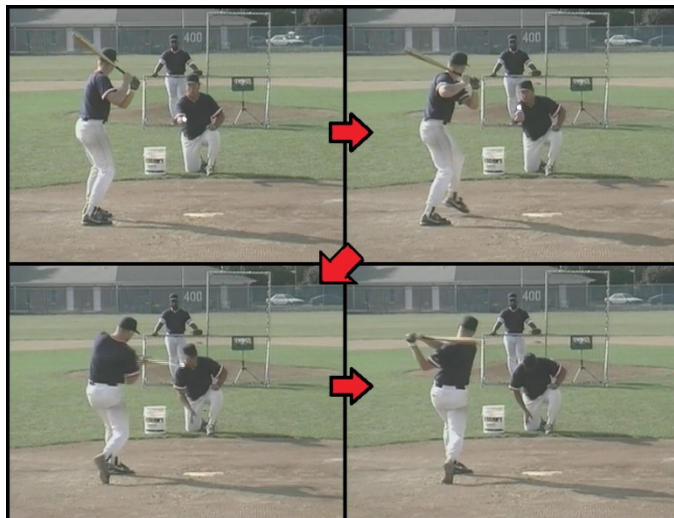
Now Ryan's a big and strong hitter and he's not catching up to me, which is good. Simply because he's still got something to work at. I want 10-15 repetitions of the Wiffle bat drill per day based on your age. If we've got a younger player, let's go about 10 repetitions; an older player, let's get 15. It'll only take you a couple minutes, but that'll generate some bat speed and plant in our mind that we've got to have good hand quickness as we start into our workout.

What you have to do is work your technique. And we work out technique by swinging the bat. Now it's nice to have a moving object. It's also nice to have somebody that can throw a strike every once in a while. So many of us have thrown so many strikes, in fact, the arm's gone and all we do is get real good at throwing 56' strikes. If your dad or your buddy's ever been out, or mom's tried to throw batting practice, you know what I mean.

This little Wiffle golf ball is a great alternate way to get extra swings. You can get these at a discount store for \$2.50 for a dozen. Get yourself a couple dozen; it's a very minimal investment for a whole lot of gain. The nice thing about the Wiffle balls is I can throw a strike every time. If I want to work Ryan inside, I can pretty much get it there because I'm so close to him. I'm only 15-20'.

Outside I can get it there. High, low, wherever he's weak at I can get it there and I can also vary it. So we have very little down time with regard to poor pitches. The second thing is it's very small, so it's hard for Ryan to hit. If he doesn't keep his head down and track the ball, he's not going to make contact. The third thing that's nice about it is it doesn't go very far. Which means we don't have to chase it 250'; it's only go 30-40'.

We're going to run Ryan through some and get some repetition. I'm going to suggest you take, prior to your batting, to your game situation batting, that you take 15-25 cuts. If you want to take more than that, great. If it's an off-day for you where you're not taking a lot of cuts, you can come out and in five minutes, you can get 50 cuts. And that's also a great by-product; you can get a lot of swings in a short period of time. It's going to take you about five, six, seven minutes to get in 50 swings.



Okay, Ryan, let's take a look here. I'm going to work him a little bit inside. Notice how I duck my head. I don't want to get hit. I like to feed them underhand and I put something on them. I don't lollypop them to him. Let's go outside. Didn't hurt, but I also didn't get hit the tip of the nose. You don't like it, you don't have to swing. Okay, let's work him up in strike zone. Good. Doesn't like it, he doesn't have to swing. 15-25 takes you just a moment and we can work on going right, we can work on going left.

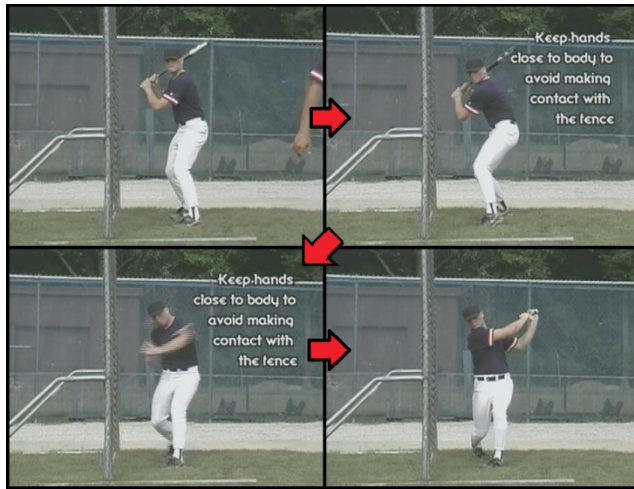
Hitting the ball wherever you want. They take just a moment to pick up and we're on to the next drill.

PART 2

Ryan's going to assist me in setting this up. If you would, Ryan, take your position. Notice that oftentimes with this drill – if I can borrow your bat for a second – coaches will have you do it this way. I don't like to do it this way. This is too easy. It's not really a challenge to me. So we set Ryan up a little closer. We're going to have him about a foot and a half away from the fence.

You'll notice there's no way he can extend his bat without making contact there. If you feel like you're not close enough or you're too far away, this is a good check point. When you place your feet, you should have a bend in your elbow. If your arm's straight,

you're too far away. You need to move up some. So Ryan's checked. He's got a bend in the arm and he's ready to go.



This is what we want. This is a technique that we want to emphasize. We want him to take his foot, he gets a little bit of movement backward, he'll take a stride with his front foot. And this is the point of emphasis. We want him to start his hips first and let the upper body follow, which is something that most hitters don't do. So he's going to rotate his hips. Notice that his upper body follows through. The bat's above the shoulder. From here he's got the bat knob pointed at the ball and he's going to let that bat ride right down alongside his

shoulder and then he'll finish his swing.

Something that it's kind of impressive once you learn how to do it because you're standing so close to the fence yet you don't make contact. And initially if you do make contact, if you let that bat slide out away from your shoulder, and you make contact, it's telling you that you're extending the arms, pushing the bat away, and you're pulling it through. We don't want that. We want the arms to stay in. We want Ryan to stay in what we call a good box.

Notice the box that he's got here. Front of the box, bottom, across the shoulders, top of the box, down the back, arms at the back of the box. Okay, Ryan. Inward turn stride. Squish a bug. Notice how his arms are still in the box.

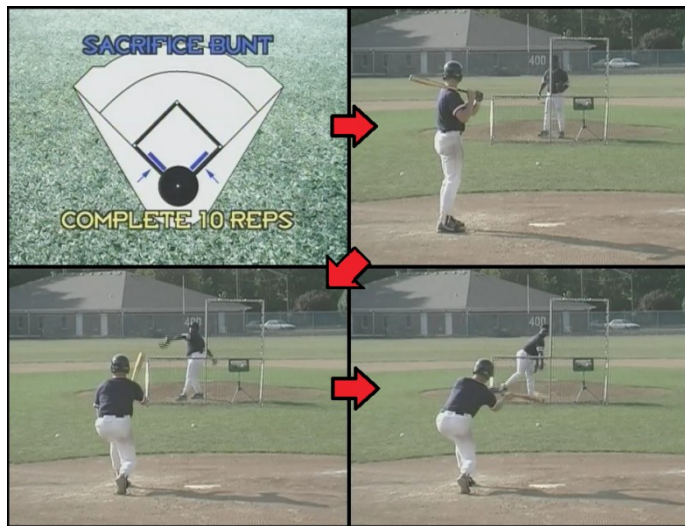
His arms haven't straightened out. He's not lost the box here. And he's going to go ahead and extend from here. Boom. Contact. And then he'll drive through it. It forces you to stay in a good box and make sure that you maintain good hand quickness and good drive through the ball.

Okay, Ryan, let's take a look at a couple. Notice how he keeps the hands in close to the body. Stays in his box. See how he executes the swing? In spite of the fact that he's standing right up on the fence. If you'd stand here, you're going to whack the fence, it's going to ring a little bit, and you're going to really feel it.

Okay, Ryan, if you would, step away from the fence about two steps. Right there. Now swing again. Same thing. I want you to emphasize the same technique. Except now he doesn't have to worry about the fence being there.

So as you execute your drill you should do at least 10 of these a day. And then back off the fence and do 10 more. Without having to worry about the fence and making contact. But every time you swing, consider doing the exact same technique as if you

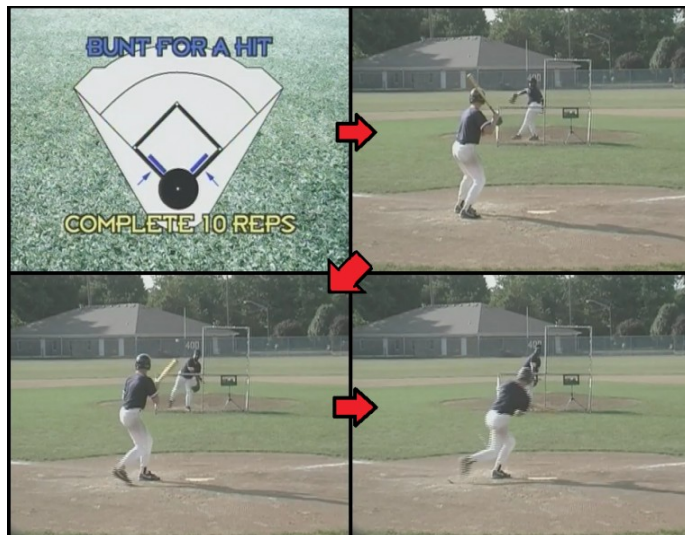
were standing right up on top of that fence. And that's just a good way to drive this drill home prior to going in to hit.



We're going to work our sacrifice bunt. Want at least 10. Two variations. Ryan's just using a swivel method now. We can also pull the back foot out in front of the plate. It's especially effective with younger players.

We want to make sure that we get proficient at doing this because about the time that you think it's not going to be called, you're going to be in a situation late in the game, your coach is going to call it and you're not going to know how to do it. Again, if it's not

a strike, we don't bunt. We want to try our best to put it down one line or the other. Ryan's doing a good job.

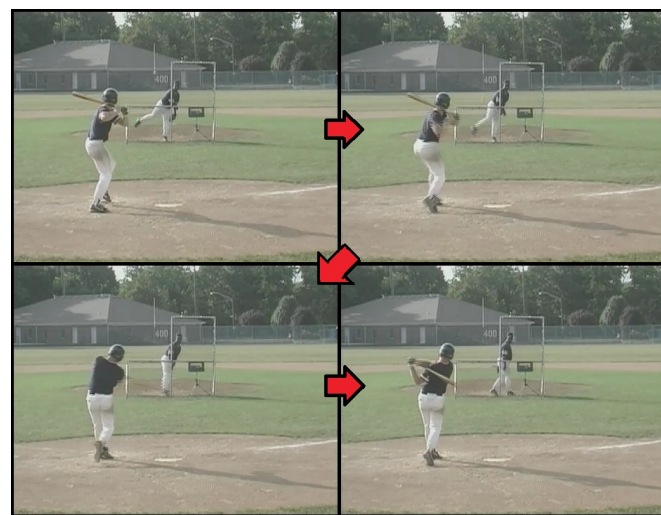


This is our bunt for a hit. You'll notice that Ryan's going to jab step with his left foot. He's going to lay the bat head down, try to get it down the line. Very nicely done. This is something that takes some technique. You know, you can pick up three or four extra hits a year with a bunt for a hit even with poor speed. If you've got outstanding speed, you can pick up more than that.

And situations that would dictate it would be early in the game when you need a base runner, or late in the game, if it's close, and you're a lead-off hitter in an inning and we need a base runner. Want to try and keep the bat head up and get it down.



Here we go. We're going to work now on our balls hitting the opposite field. This is a difficult drill at best. Seventy percent of the pitches that are thrown to a hitter are thrown on the outside third of the plate, yet we don't typically do a very good job of hitting the ball that way and that's why most pitchers try to work you outside. We're going to let the hands lead on this. It's important to look at and hit the inside middle of the ball.



See, Ryan got an inside pitch there just a little bit and went inside-out on it, was able to hit it to right. We want to try our best to drive the ball hard, look at and hit the inside middle of the ball. Good job handling the bat. Nice rip down the line. Base hit in the gap. That's it.

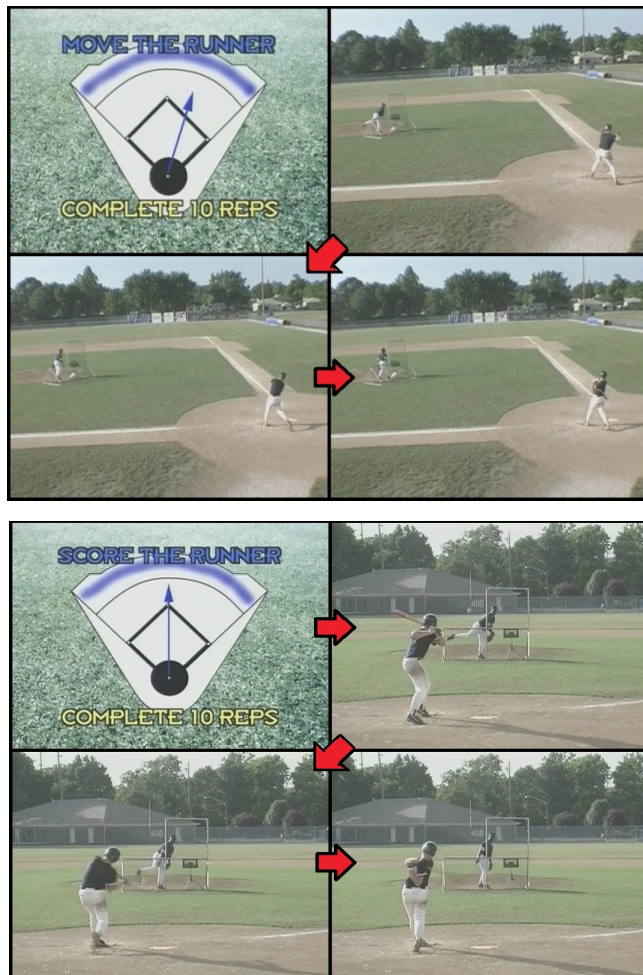


This is our hit and run. Object here is for Ryan to hit a ground ball, the right side. We're going to try to move the runner from first to third. Second baseman will be covering in this steal situation. And he's going to try to hit to the vacated area right through second base. inside-out to swing.

And even a softly-hit ball like that will work just fine. We want to try our best to keep the ball out of the air and onto the ground. The only option that this hitter has to not swing would be if a ball were thrown in the dirt, which is an almost impossible ball for the catcher to handle. High pitches, outside pitches, inside pitches, they all have to be gone after if only to protect the runner. Two more. Good. Very nice. That's good.

Okay, our job now is going to be to move the runner from second to third with no outs. The objective is to get to third base with less than two outs. So we're going to work this especially down in the count. If we get two strikes, we're going to try to protect. We've

either got to hit a ground ball to the right side like we just did there with Ryan, or we need a deep fly ball to right field.



Again, you're going to give yourself up, sacrifice yourself in order to get that runner in a scoring position with no outs. And that will allow us, even if we make an out here, to have the runner at third base with one out. Good. There's your deep fly ball and that'll move the runner up at minimum.

Now we're going to attempt to score the runner. That will certainly get the job done. We have to hit the ball back up to the middle where a second baseman and shortstop are playing at double-play depth, or we need to get the ball deep enough into the outfield that we can score the runner.

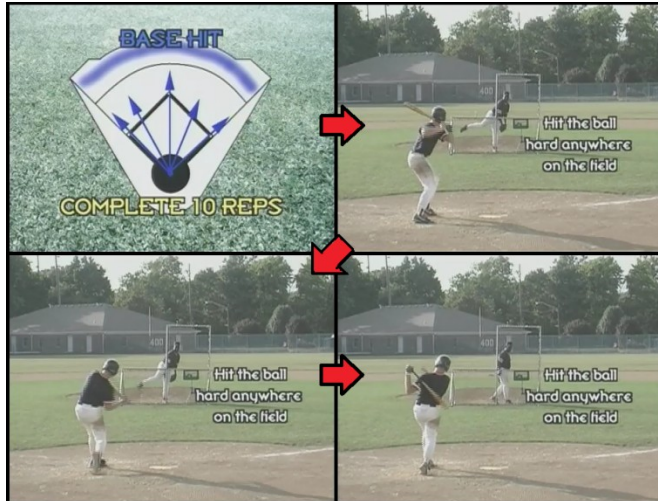
We have to pick a pitch we can hit hard somewhere. We cannot afford to pop a ball up in the infield. We can't afford a weak ground ball, especially to the corner infielders because your base runner won't be able to advance if we do. Deep fly ball such as that will get the job done. Good.

Okay, we're going to finish our workout with 10 base hits. We need to hit the ball hard somewhere, anywhere you like. This allows kind of a cool-down period mentally and yet we're still getting something done. And also this is your opportunity to feel good about what you've done. Hit the ball hard somewhere. Finish your round on a high note. That's alright. Keep your head down. Bury your head. Concentrate. There you go. Hit hard. Nice rip.

PART 3

You know, it's nice to be able to get on base with a hit or to be able to hit like Ryan does, or if you can find your way on with a walk or whatever. But it's important once you do get on to know what you're doing.

So we're going to talk a little bit about how to get through the bag, how to take a lead off first, how to steal, how to take a lead off second and even off third. And once we've done that, hopefully, it's going to make you just a step quicker on your quest for home plate.



Alright, let's work at getting down the first base line. When we come down the first base line, we want to make sure that we hit, if at all possible, the front of the bag. However, and this is a big however, don't change your footsteps in order to be able to hit the front of the bag. Hit wherever you can and get through it hard.

Once we get through the bag, we're going to go through four or five steps and we're going to take a look to the right. So we're going to turn our head

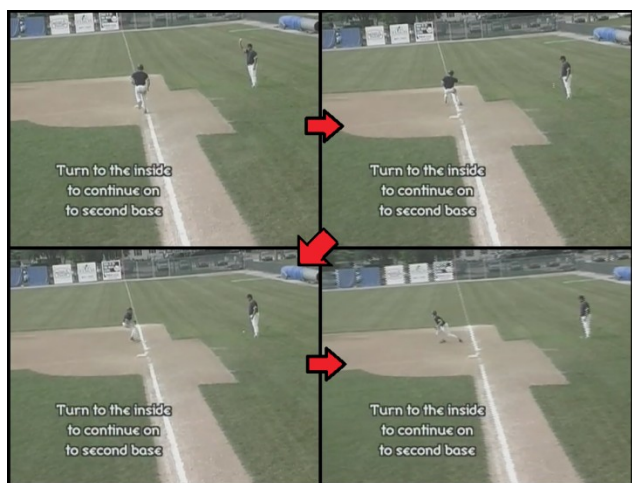
and look to the right, see if there's been an overthrow, and if there has we can continue on. If there hasn't, we'll break down and come on back.



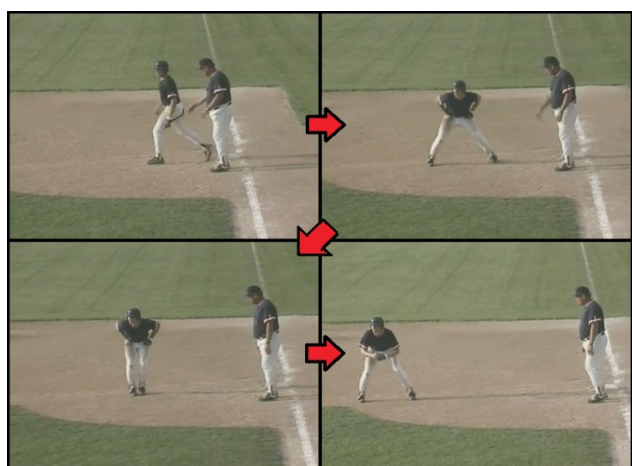
Okay, Ryan, here we go. Let's run through the bag. Runs through the bag hard. Hits. Looks to the right. No overthrow. He'll return on the foul side of the line. Through the base. Hit. Break down. Return to the bag. Go. Through the bag hard. Hits. Breaks down. Looks to the right. No overthrow. Returns to the bag.

Okay, after we get through the bag and we recognize there's not been an overthrow, we come back to the base. We all know what to do then. What about if there's an overthrow? We

look to the right, we see that the ball's been thrown over the first baseman's head, and we have to continue on to second base. Notice how Ryan turns to the inside and starts on to second. He's going to watch me. If I drop the ball, that indicates to him the ball's been overthrown and he'll continue on.



Okay, Ryan, here we go. Through the bag hard. Ball's been dropped. Rotates to the inside and on his way he goes. Gets through the bag. Looks. Ball's down. Spins to the inside and goes on.



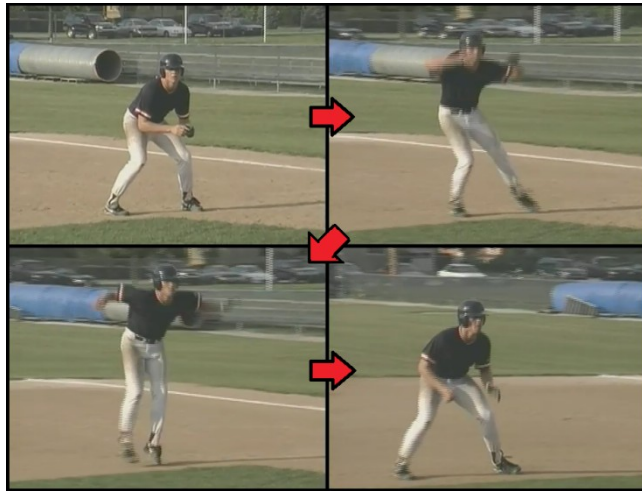
Okay, we ask as they take their lead-offs, to do it in a specific way. You've got to give the third base coach an opportunity to flash his signs. Whatever sign system that he likes to go through, we have to have a chance to do that and for him to not get picked off in the process. So we're going to ask Ryan to stay on top of the base.

In our system, once I've given my signs and I've put the steal on, then I'll clap – even if I haven't put it on, whatever I've done, I'm going to clap and that will free Ryan up to take his lead. Once he takes a lead, we do it this way so as not to cross our feet. We're going to take a step with our left foot, turn and take a step with our right, and then we're going to shuffle. Shuffle. Shuffle. And that's a pretty good lead.

A decent lead for a high school player would be about 9'. A real good lead would be somewhere in the vicinity of 12 or more. We want to get at least 9'. You can do that simply by measuring yourself off. If I were to go about 3', I know I'm 3' off the bag, I know I'm 6' off the bag. Right here. And that's kind of what Ryan's done, except he knows pretty much where he's going to go all the time.

Alright, Ryan, come on back. Let's try it again. He starts on the bag, watches the third base coach. I flash the signs. Clap my hands. He's free to take his lead. Left, right. Shuffle. Shuffle. Once he's gotten his lead... this is the way we need to have it done. We want him to move to the back edge of the bag so that if he returns to the bag, he's going to be in a position to get his hand far away from the first baseman and make him make a longer tag.

We also want him to drop his right foot to half the distance of his left so that when he makes his first movement, his first pivot, he's going to run in a straight line. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line, so we want to run in a straight line. If you go parallel with your feet, you're going to step out and around, you're going to cause yourself to take at least one extra step.



Okay, when Ryan breaks down to get in his lead position, we also don't want him to get too low. If he gets too low, first movement he's going to make is to pop straight up. That's not moving us to second. So we want him in a position that when he breaks and goes to second base, he's at a dead sprint right now. We're going to take this left arm and pull hard as he makes the turn, and he's going to go right straight to the bag. This way.

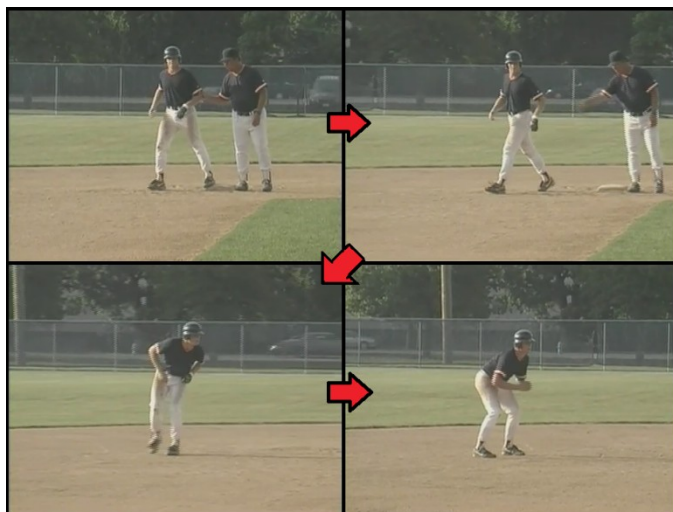
So as we get our lead, let's make sure that we get a left, right, shuffle, shuffle, and in position to make your good break, drop your right foot, see the play, boom, we're ready to go.

If there is no steal on, if all we have is a pitch that's gone to the plate, we're going to get what we call a secondary lead. Okay, Ryan, take your lead. Ryan's in his regular lead position. I've already clapped. Left, right, shuffle, shuffle. Okay, now we're going to work on a secondary lead. A secondary lead is getting a little bit extra after the pitch has crossed the plate. We want to make sure that he gets at least two good shuffles off the bag.

Okay, Ryan, you ready? Ready? Go. Shuffle, shuffle, and survey the situation. Now if the ball's been hit, he's off to second base. If it's not been hit, he can retreat back. If it's popped up, we'll take whatever the situation gives us or dictates to us and we'll go from there. Let's take a look at it one more time. He's in his regular lead position. Right foot's dropped. He's in position to sprint. Okay, the ball crosses home plate, it wasn't contacted, and he's into his secondary lead. And, again, can react either situation.

This is where we all want to be, second base, scoring position. We've got two different ways that we teach this. One is with less than two outs and the other is with two outs. And that's going to cause us to vary our lead a little bit based on what we want. Ryan's going to help me with our lead with less than two outs.

Okay, Ryan, let's go ahead and take it once the coach has clapped and given you the free-up sign to take your lead. Ryan's going to get behind the bag. Once the pitcher



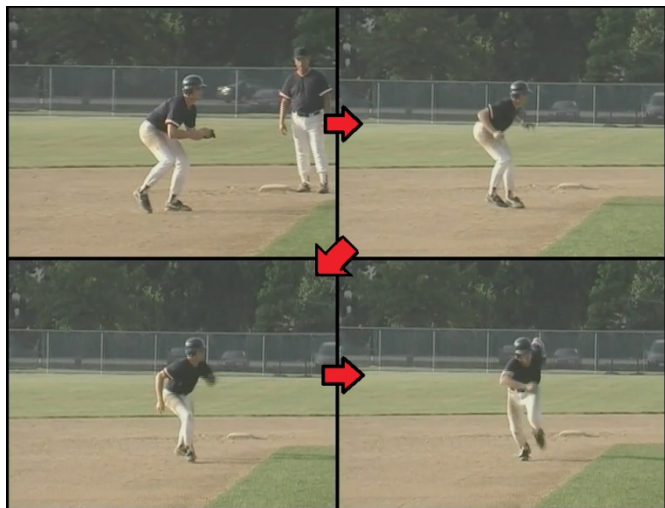
comes set and is in his set, Ryan's going to begin to walk up and over. You're going to notice how he's creeping a little bit toward third. It's kind of an optical illusion to the pitcher.

And when the pitcher gets ready to deliver the ball, and the ball's crossed home plate, we want Ryan in a straight line between second and third. Once the ball's crossed the plate, if it's not been contacted, we're going to be into our shuffle step... go ahead, Ryan, two shuffles. And that's where we need to be. Okay, Ryan, we'll come

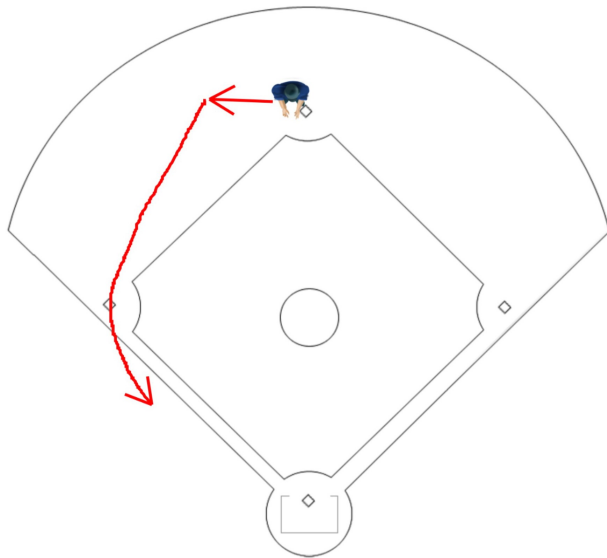
on back and let's try it again.

Okay. Less than two outs. We're going to take our lead. Alright. As soon as the pitcher comes into his set position, Ryan's going to start walking up and he's also going to walk over, he's going to chew up some yardage. Pitch has crossed the plate, into our shuffles. Good.

We're right there and now he can retreat back. If the ball's been contacted, we're on to third base. But notice how we walk up and over. We're going to gain some yardage toward third base as we go. It's important, however, with less than two strikes, or less than two outs – excuse me – with less than two outs that he be in a straight line between second and third. Because in a forced play situation, he's got to bust his tail to the back.



With two outs we're going to change it a little bit. Ryan's going to take his lead and he's going to take a deep lead and keep it. So from here, rather than walking up and over, we're going to get our shuffle steps and he's going to try to catch his angle at third base and score on the single. The object here is to score on the single with two outs. They're going to have to throw somebody out at the plate if I'm coaching third base.



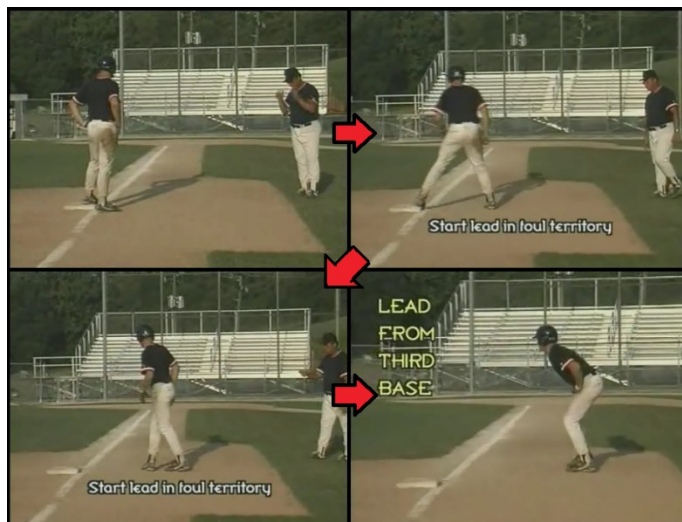
Okay, pitch has crossed the plate, he's into his shuffles. Nothing's happened and he's still in good position to retreat if he needs to. If the ball's been contacted, then he's on to the break, he's going to hit the inside corner of third base and be onto the plate, cutting down the number of steps that he has to run out and around third base and into the grass.

Those are our two versions. With less than two outs, we walk up and over; and with two outs, we stay deep and catch the angle at third.

PART 4

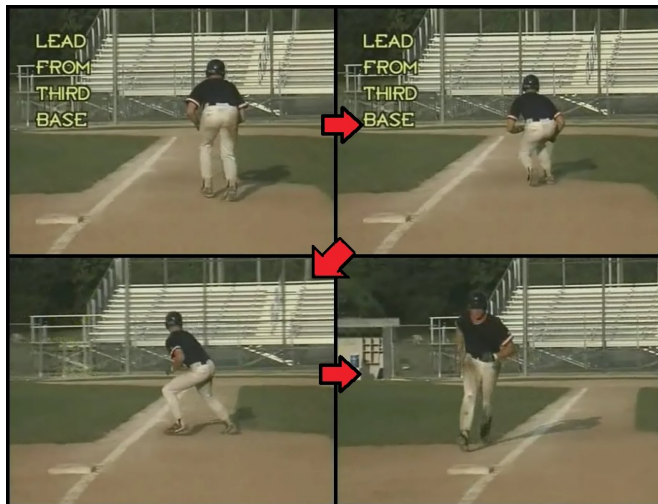
There are seven ways to score from third that you can't from second, so the true objective in baseball is to get runners here. Especially with less than two outs. Once you do, it's important, however, to note how we want to get a lead and how we want to get a break.

So many times in baseball games, be it youth league games or high school, we get less than two outs, fly ball into the outfield, and the base runner breaks down the line and is



unable to tag up and score on a sacrifice fly. That can be avoided if you work at it a little bit in your practices, or you can work at it on your own for that matter, thinking through each situation.

First situation we want a runner to be aware of is how to take an appropriate lead off third base such that if a ball were contacted down the line, and this runner were hit with the baseball, that he's not going to be out. Again, and I'll remind you, all base



runners should stay on the base until such time as they've been given the signals and they've gotten the clap of the hands or whatever you like to use, and then they're free to take their lead.

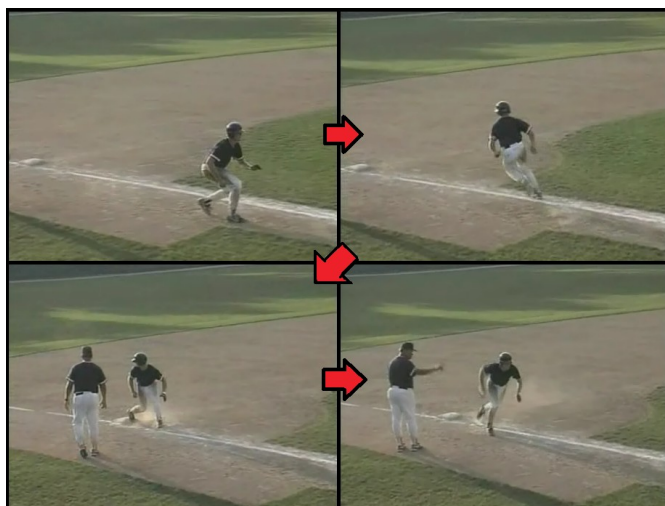
Okay, as Ryan's watching me give my signs, as soon as I clap my hands he's free to go ahead and take his lead. Okay, now he takes his lead. He's going to start in foul territory. And Ryan's going to take what we call a walking lead. He'll get a decent lead to begin with and then as the pitcher

releases the ball, he's going to walk down the line. The weight's going to be on the right foot or left foot; whichever you prefer to have as long as your weight's leaning forward.

Once the ball crosses the plate and it's not been contacted, he's going to return in fair territory. So he's going to go down in foul so that if he were hit with a foul ball he's not going to be out. If you're hit in fair territory, you're out.

And we don't want to do that once we've got our runner 90' from home plate. But yet once the ball's not been contacted, we're going to go from foul territory and return back in fair. And the reason we do that is because now you've made it terribly difficult for a catcher to make a pick-off throw based on where third basemen normally hold the runners. He can't hardly throw it over the top of the runner's head, so many times they'll just shut down and won't make the throw at all. So we're down in foul, back in fair.

Once we've made sure that our runner knows how to take an appropriate lead, let's work him a little bit. You can do this with an entire team, you can do it with a single individual, you can do it on your own. But we need to make sure we know what to do when the ball's been contacted.



We're going to pretend for just a moment that every situation we're in has less than two outs. With two outs, we know what we do; we're going to run all the time. But with less than outs, there's going to be some variation as to what's going on.

Okay, Ryan, hop on the bag. This is going to be a ground ball to the middle infield and we're going to score on it. Okay, ground ball to the middle infield and we're going to score with less than

two outs. Okay, Ryan, take your lead. Clap of the hands. We're going to get a walking lead. He'll walk. Ground ball. Boom.

And he's onto a break. We don't hesitate. We get that good walking lead. The weight's planted on the right foot, leaning forward. The ball's hit and he's off to the races. If we hesitate, somebody's going to get thrown out. So we've got a ground ball up the middle that we can go on.

Alright, let's take a look at another one. We've got a line drive situation. So the ball's contacted on a line and we tell the runners at third they have to freeze right where they're at. They can't move right or left until they read the ball and see where it's at. Okay, let's do it, Ryan. Clap of the hands. Walking lead. Line drive. Base hit. Okay, I called base hit. Once it's through he can go ahead and break. Okay, Ryan, come on back.

It'd be nice if we got all base hits on these; doesn't work that way though. Occasionally, a line drive gets hit at somebody and it's caught. So we cover that one too. Ready? Clap of the hands. Takes his primary lead. Walking lead. Line drive. Caught. Ball's caught. Back he goes. Okay? So we're going to retreat back to the base. So we've got a line drive where it's a base hit and a line drive where it's being caught. Again, the important point is that you freeze and you don't move right or left.

Alright. Third and final situation that we can cover is a fly ball into the outfield with less than two outs. I have nothing to do with when he tags up. This is his responsibility totally. So we've got not outs, fly ball hit into the outfield. Okay, Ryan'll go ahead and take a lead. Let's say, for instance, the ball's been hit to center. He's going to come back to tag up. He's going to watch the center fielder. When it's caught, he'll break. If the ball's been hit down the left field line in foul territory, he simply would turn his body and watch it this way. He's not going to wait for me to tell him when to go, he's going to go on his own. We want to make sure we don't leave too early where they can appeal the play or where, in some cases now it's automatic, they just call you out if you leave early.

Okay, Ryan, we're going to get a lead and I'll call it for you. Walking lead. Fly ball left. Okay, go back and tag. Watch. It's caught. Boom. And off he goes. Notice how he comes to the bag, sets himself up, watches the ball, and then he breaks. Okay? Come on back. Okay. Clap of the hands, we take our lead. Gets his walking lead. Foul ball third base line. Comes back and tags. Turns his body, watches. Caught. Boom. And off we go. Okay, Ryan, come on back.

Just a little bit of effort working on these each day – and this can be one of your conditioning drills if you like – but just a little bit of effort going through these situations will certainly help you in a game and it'll avoid those situations where on a fly ball somebody doesn't tag. Teach the players what you like to do personally as a player or as a coach, and then you can go through your format. But work at it on a daily basis.