

## **How to Position Your Outfielders Like the Pros**

**Left fielder** - The left fielder should preferably be a right-handed thrower so that he can better cover and release the ball that is hit down the left field line. A left-handed left fielder will have a difficult time holding a runner to a single on any ball hit down the line. However, this is the most important concern in placing an outfielder in left field. Since the left fielder will only have one long throw to make (to the plate), the left fielder should be the fielder with the weakest arm. Due to the fact that the majority of hitters are right-handed, he will have fewer problems on balls that slice away from him than the right fielder. Thus, the weakest of the three outfielders should be placed in left field.

**Center fielder** - The center fielder should be the quickest outfielder due to the fact he will have more area of the outfield to cover than either the left fielder or right fielder. He must be the most instinctive outfielder in reacting to the batted ball, along with being the most aggressive one of the outfielders. With the numerous back up responsibilities he will have, along with patrolling the largest area of the outfield, the center fielder should be the team's all around best defensive outfielder. A team can sacrifice a little offensive production when they can place a young man in center field who can run the ball down, a coach can sacrifice a powerful arm for an accurate one in his center fielder, but he can never sacrifice speed and the ability to get the jump on the ball.

**Right fielder** - The right fielder should preferably be a left-handed thrower so that he can better cover and release the ball that is hit down the right field line. However, the strength of his throwing arm has got to be the most important consideration in placing a young man in right field. Since he will have two long throws to make (third base and the plate), it necessitates having the outfielder with the strongest throwing arm in right field. The right fielder should be an experienced outfielder due to the nature of the balls hit to his position, mainly the line drives hit by right-handed hitters that will have a tendency to slice toward the right field line. Being that right field is the sun field in most baseball parks, the right fielder must have the ability to handle the obstacle that the sun might present in fielding a fly ball.

### **BASIC OUTFIELD POSITIONING**

**Ability of the adjacent outfielders(s)** - There is no reason for outfielders to position themselves an equal distance apart from each other when they all have various strengths and weaknesses in regard to going after a ball in the outfield. For example, the center fielder should always shade toward the side of the slower outfielder. Another example would be the case where the center fielder has great speed, which would allow the left fielder and right fielder to shade a little closer to their respective foul line.

**Wind factor** - When the wind is going to be a factor affecting the flight path of the ball, the outfielders must shade a few steps in the direction of the wind as they position themselves for each hitter. The distance away from their normal position would be affected by the intensity of the wind. It also must be understood that the baseball will carry farther in light dry air, and carry less in heavy damp air.

**Position of the fences** - The distance of the outfield fence should play a big part in the basic positioning of the outfielders for each hitter. The closer the fence, the shallower the outfielder can play. The farther the fence, the deeper the outfielder must play. The same holds true to a lesser degree in regard to the fence distance away from the foul line. If the fence is very close to the foul line it will enable the right fielder or left fielder to play a few steps further away from the line than if the fence was quite a distance away from the line.

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**Speed of the infielders** - If the infielder in front of the outfielder has great speed, and can go back extremely well on a fly ball, this will enable the outfielder to position himself a few steps deeper. Likewise, if the infielder in front of the outfielder has poor speed, and has proven that he has a difficult time going back on fly balls, the outfielder would have to position himself a few steps shallower.

**Pitcher's ability** - If the pitcher on the mound is a power pitcher with an excellent fast ball, it will usually cause batters to hit the ball late. If he is a breaking ball pitcher with very little velocity on his fast ball, the tendency would be for most hitters to pull his pitcher. If a pitcher is wild, it is best to shade all hitters a little deeper, especially if the pitcher is wild high. If a pitcher is tiring late in a game, it is best that the outfielders shade a little deeper.

**Batter's Ability** - Each outfielder must quickly assess each individual batter's hitting ability in order to properly position himself for that particular batter. The coaches can assist the outfielders in evaluating the opposing hitters by watching them hit in batting practice or through the use of scouting cards which chart each ball hit in previous games. Any positioning in the outfield acknowledges the batter's strength areas and where he is most likely to hit the ball hard.

**The count on the batter** - In a previous section of the Playbook, defensive movement with the count was detailed for the outfielders. Movement with the count for the outfielders must standard for all three fielders so that gaps are not created in the outfield when only one or two outfielders move with the count.

**Runners on base** - Before each pitch, the outfielders must know how many men are on base, where they are, how fast they are, and what effect will be on the status of the game if they score. The batter-runner would also be considered as a base runner. This information would better allow the outfielder to make the proper throw, anticipate steals, pick-off plays and bunts.

**The inning and the score** - Each outfielder must discipline himself to continually know the inning, the score, and late in the game what runner(s) represent the tying or winning runs. This information will often dictate how deep the outfield must play.

**The number of outs** - Since most hitters will go after the long ball with two outs and no runners on base, the outfield should shade a little deeper in this situation. With two outs and a runner at first base, the outfield should shade a little deeper to get better angles on balls down the line or in the gap to prevent the runner at first base from scoring. Runners will run differently according to the number of outs, and this needs to be taken into consideration also. Thus, the number of outs will help dictate depth in the outfield.

**Outfielder's own ability** - This is one of the primary concerns when an outfielder positions himself in the outfield. His arm strength, ability to go left and right, ability to come in on the ball, ability to go back on the ball, are all taken into consideration by the outfielder in deciding where to position the hitter at the plate.

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