

## Training drills – Defensive strategies

Once players have learned the basic fundamental skills, it's a good time to start practising defensive strategies that can be used in a game situation.

These include the:

- Run down play
- Cut of play
- Relay play
- Pick off play



### Run down play

This play is an important part of effective defence and all teams should know how to execute it properly. Every run-down play should result in an out for the defence.

When to use the run down play:

- When a runner is trapped between two bases

Practising the run down play:

- Set two fielders up at each base
- Place two runners at each base with a runner in the middle.
- Try and force the runner back to the original base – do not allow them to advance
- Players must cover all bases and learn not to be drawn away from the base
- Keep the ball visible to the receiver
- Fielders must not get in the way of the runner or they will be awarded the next base
- Once a fielder with the ball has chased the runner back and thrown the ball, they then follow their throw and wait at the next base
- This continues until the runner has been tagged or makes it safely to the base.

### Cut off play

Another important aspect of creating a total defence is the manner in which your team brings the ball in from the outfield on safe hits and sacrifice flies with one or more runners on base. To do this in the most efficient and effective way possible, use a cut-off play.

When to use a cut off play:

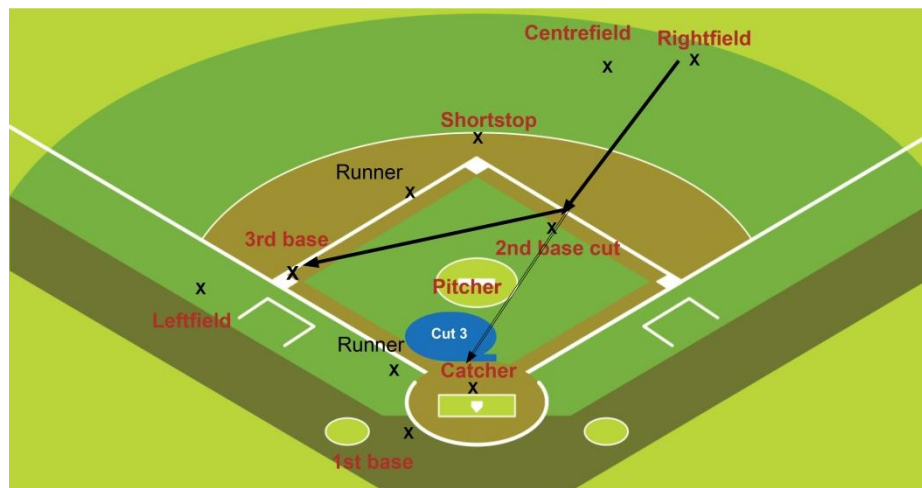
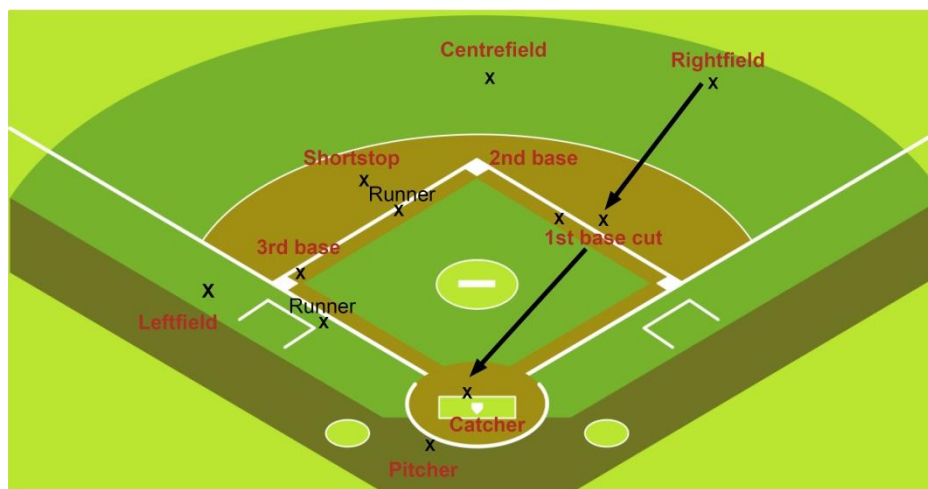
- A defensive player is stationed between the outfielder and the base to which the lead runner could advance
- Cut-off player stands (3m - 5m) inside base line - facing outfielder
- Outfielder throws ball to destination base at height where cut-off player can catch it if desired
- Ball is cut-off or allowed to proceed depending on possibility of a play on lead runner
- If a cut-off, play is made on the back runner

## Practising the cut off play

- A defensive player is stationed between the outfielder and the base to which the lead runner could advance
- Cut-off player stands (3m - 5m) inside base line - facing outfielder
- Outfielder throws ball to destination base at height where cut-off player can catch it if desired
- Ball is cut-off or allowed to proceed depending on the possibility of a play on the lead runner
- If a cut-off, play is made this will be on the back runner

You will notice a difference between these two diagrams.

- The top diagram shows 1st base taking the cut and makes the throw to home to get the runner.
- 2nd base is covering the base as there is also a runner between 2nd and 3rd base.
- The bottom diagram shows the runner almost home, the catcher calls 'cut 3' to get the runner heading for 3rd base.



Practising the cut of play:

- Plan to have all bases covered whenever possible
- The cut-off player must be inside the base path to observe all base-runners
- The cut-off player should raise their arms to provide a target for the outfielder
- The catcher or the intended receiver must decide quickly if a play is possible or if a cut-off is better
- The cut-off player must be a good ball handler

## Relay play

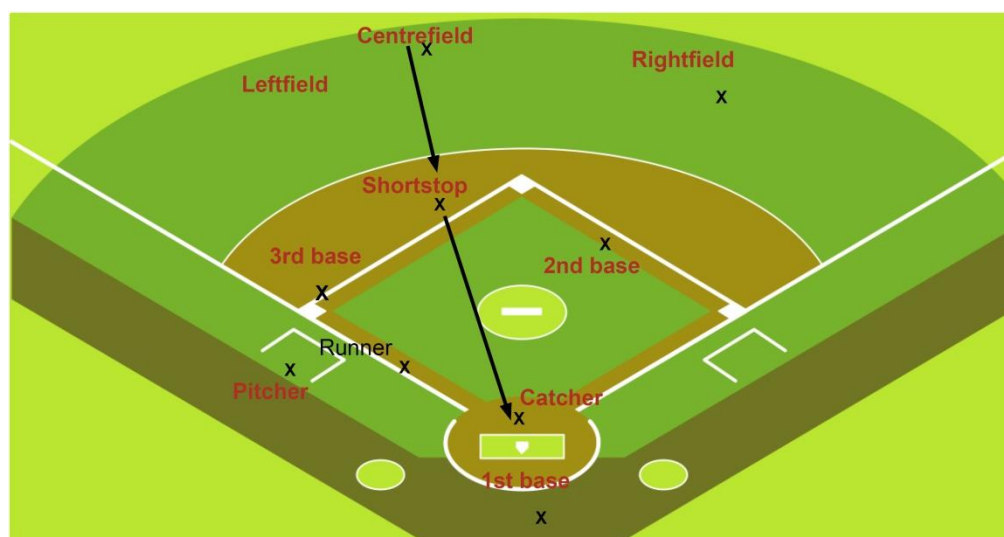
So far we have been looking at cut-off plays in situations involving a single base hit. Where there is an extra base hit, another defensive player is inserted as the relay player.

When to use the relay play:

- To decrease the time required to move the ball in
- Increase the accuracy of the throw
- Play the ball on the fly - no bounce
- Relay player located about one-half distance between the infield and the ball

Practising the relay play:

- Relay player stands facing outfielder with hands raised as target
- As ball approaches, relay player pivots so that glove side is towards the infield
- The relay player catches the ball in throwing position and relays to the cut-off player or the base



## Pick off play

The pick off play is generally used at 1st or 3rd base. The pick off at 1st base is used when the runner is getting big lead. The pick off at 3rd base is generally used to try and stop a run from scoring

It's used to surprise the offence and get a quick out. This will often force the runners to be less aggressive. Communication is critical, all players involved in the play need to be aware of their responsibilities and acknowledge with a signal. Players also need to know the which bases they will be backing up.

When to use a pick off play:

- Surprise the offence and get a quick out
- Force the offence to be less aggressive
- To prevent an important run from scoring
- Using a pitch out will increase the chance of success and neutralise a possible hit-and-run play

Practising the pick off play:

Pick off at 1st base:

- On the pitch the 1st base player, plays in tight as if expecting the bunt
- The 2nd base player moves back and cheats toward 1st base to behind the runner
- With the pitch, the 1st base player charges forward as if to field the bunt
- The 2nd base player moves quickly to 2nd base from behind the runner
- The catcher receives the pitch and immediately throws to 1st base
- The 2nd base player and the ball should arrive at the base at the same time
- Right field charges with the pitch to back up 1st base in case of an overthrow

Pick off at 3rd base:

The pick off at 3rd base is executed in identical fashion, but using the Shortstop and 3rd base players, with Left field backing up.

- When to use the pick off play:
- With an important run on 3<sup>rd</sup> base
- If the runner is getting a big lead off the base

