

Outfield Drills

Outfield drills-Shoot the Gap

This Fastpitch outfield drill we call “Shoot the Gap”. The object of this drill is to get your outfielders moving to the ball and moving to back up each other. Position one player at second base to act as the cut off and then position the rest of the players in left field and center field.

One coach is positioned at home plate to hit or shoot fly balls and the other coach can be in the outfield to monitor technique and instruct the players. The balls will be hit to the gap in left center. The outfielders will then move to the ball with one girl calling for it and the other girl should then take an angle to back up the play. When the ball is fielded, it is then thrown back in to second base where she can either put the ball in a bucket or relay it to home.



I prefer to use the jugs pitching machine to shoot the balls due to its consistency and ease of use. As the balls are thrown back to second base, she can just drop the balls into a bucket and when her bucket is full return it to home plate. You should be able to get 4 or 5 fly balls in under a minute.



This is also a great time for the coach in the outfield to be using his stopwatch. Time the play from when the ball comes out of the machine until the ball is caught at second base. This will give your outfielders a sense of urgency and it will also give them a mark to improve on. For example, if they perform the drill the first time in 7.2 seconds, they will then be hustling to beat that time on their next turn. As every coach of a youth softball team knows, **HOLDING** the ball in the outfield is a cardinal sin.

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Outfield drills-Around the World

"Around the World" Outfield Practice Drill is designed to get your outfielders moving and expand their coverage area and comfort zone while fielding fly balls. It often seems that if the ball is not hit very near the player, they either don't move to the ball or get a very late break on the ball. To overcome this challenge we developed our Around the World drill.

This outfield practice drill can be run using two different methods. The first method is much more controlled and accurate by utilizing a pitching machine to shoot the fly balls. Utilizing the [pitching machine](#) to shoot fly balls ensures the accuracy of the fly ball as opposed to mis-hits by the coach. Using this approach guarantees that you can obtain maximum running distance for the player.

The field set up for this outfield practice drill is to locate the pitching machine around home plate. Loosen the bottom bolt on a Jugs pitching machine so that the machine will freely rotate from foul line to foul line.

Position a player at second base to act as the cut-off point for the return throws of the outfielders. Be sure to have an empty bucket at second base to collect all of the balls. As the bucket gets full, the player can run the bucket back to the coach at the pitching machine. This will prevent delays during the drill and keep a continuous flow to the practice.

Position the rest of your players in the outfield on the foul line. One player will complete this outfield drill before the next player begins. The object of this outfield practice drill is to have a player catch four or five fly balls as they run from one foul line to the other. How many fly balls they can catch will depend on their age and speed.

Begin by shooting a fly ball to the outfielder on the left field foul line. After he catches the ball and throws it to second base, the coach should immediately shoot another fly ball towards the left center field. The player, as soon as they have thrown the ball back to second base, should immediately begin running towards center field to be in position to make the next catch. This process then continues until the fielder has reached the right field foul line. The player, having just completed the drill, will then proceed to second base to be the new cut-off person and the previous cut-off person will then get in line to run the drill. Be sure to run this drill in the opposite direction as well. When your players learn to make a running backhanded catch you will be well on your way to having an air tight defense.

An alternative to this method is to use two coaches to hit the fly balls. Have one coach hit to left field and left center. Have the other coach hit to right center and right field. Running the drill in this manner keeps two players participating rather than just one. It also teaches the player to read the ball coming off of the bat. It also requires that you have two players around second base to act as the cut-offs. It's best to position one of the cut-offs at the shortstop position and the other at the second base position so that errant throws don't become a safety issue.

I generally prefer using the pitching machine method to run this drill. If a team is only able to practice catching fly balls once or twice a week, then I believe the volume provided by the pitching machine is priceless. However, if a team is able to practice fly balls on a daily basis then I would suggest hitting the balls instead. First, if the coach hits fly balls every day, he will become proficient at placing the ball. Second, the player learning to read the ball off of the bat is an important skill development.

Depending on the skill level of your ballplayers will determine how far apart you shoot the balls and how much time they have to get from one position to the next. This is an excellent drill for players 10 years old and older. If the player is just developing his fly ball skills, the machine can be set to throw lower fly balls and the drill can be run around the infield.

At the 12U and above level, this drill can be used to teach your players to really stretch their coverage area. The idea is to get them to see a fly ball that may be fifty feet away, but start running to it because they believe they can get there and make the out.