

## **Coaching Tip: Let's Get Out, Well Not Really!**

By: Joe Benedetti

It can be a great challenge to get your players to be smart, aggressive, independent base runners.

Often inexperienced players underestimate their abilities on the base paths and overestimate the defensive capabilities of the opponent.

After teaching your players the fundamental base running skills and techniques, such as: getting out of the batters box, proper sprinting form, rounding a base, jamming, diving back (retreat slide), other evasive slides, proper explosive leadoffs and tag ups, making the best of a run-down or hot box situation, etc. and some of the rules of base running with respect to interference and obstruction, there is still more that has to be done in order for players to develop good "instincts" and judgment on the base paths.

Good base runners are taught to know, and understand when the situations calls for an aggressive approach and when a more conservative strategy is in order

Being aware of the obvious things like: the score, inning, outs, the count, time – limits, mercy rules, who is up next in the batting order, defensive capabilities and tendencies, etc. will make your runners more effective on the base paths. Dedicated coaches practise long and hard on re-enacting base running situations. They take pride in teaching their players to properly "read" the hit or throw to maximize the number of total bases achieved in a game. Over time their goal is to develop players who will make good, sound decisions on the base paths and rely less on coaches to "tell" or signal them when to run. A system of "run to me" can be employed for a period of time in the season, where at player will go from first to third, or second to home automatically. It is up to the coach to STOP the runner, if not they are going!

A more radical approach, that might appeal to some coaches, is to pick a four or five game period very early in the regular season and tell the players that the goal is that every player get **OUT** once, in one of the following ways:

1. Getting caught stealing
2. Getting out stretching a single or a walk into a double, a single into a double, a double into a triple, etc.
3. Getting out going from first to third, or second to home on a hit or passed ball.
4. Getting called out by the umpire for leading off too early
5. Getting picked off a base
6. Getting called out for leaving a base too early on a tag up etc.

Now special care must be taken to make sure the players get the message that this is not a joke, and the objectives is not to get out by the proverbial mile, but to challenge yourself, and put pressure on the defense to make good throw, catches and tags.

When this tip works well, many players will be successful many times before they actually get out because they will concentrate and focus on using proper technique and form and all their base running skills and guile.

Keep track of who didn't get out when they were "trying" to; and who got out and how, and make the "lesson" part of your post game debriefing. It can get interesting in the pre-game meeting when the list of "players who have not gotten out yet" is read!

The benefits of the above strategy are many and include:

1. More aggressive baserunning, and using good baserunning skills.
2. Increased awareness of individual potential and perceived limits and fears
3. Understanding the benefits of taking risks
4. Learning to respect the defense of your opponent but not overly so

5. Having some fun with a “different” kind of goal.
6. Learning and dealing with getting out ,and learning that it is not the end of the world and sometimes worth risk

Try this strategy, or any version of it that makes sense to you, in your particular coaching context and see how your players react. I think it will become a technique you use every year to help your players learn the nuances of good baserunning. By using these tips and other similar ones, your team will be ready in the key competitions to do the right thing at the right time. But even better yet, they will start to learn the even more important lesson that sometimes you have to know when to do the “wrong” thing at the right time!

Have a great year, running around those bases!