

Six Fundamentals of Fielding

The Tiger's organization uses these drills and techniques to instruct their young players and I have seen big improvements in my infielders because of it. Here are the basics.

Something that seems very simple – catching a ground ball – becomes complicated by the fact that you have to catch it and then make a strong, accurate throw to a teammate in time to get an opposing player out. We will break this out into what I call the “6 F’s of Fielding.” They are: feet, field, funnel, footwork, fire, follow.

Feet

Proper footwork before the delivery, as the pitch is released and as the ball enters the hitting zone, is a key to being a good infielder. You want to get yourself in the best position possible to react and move side to side to field a batted ball as quickly as possible.

- * Be in a relaxed position as the pitcher holds the ball.
- * On the pitcher’s first movement bend your back slightly.
- * When the pitcher’s arm is moving forward and reaches the ear, take a small step forward with either foot and then separate your feet into a ready position.
- * The feet should be about shoulder-width apart with the knees slightly bent.
- * Separating both feet at the same time ensures that your weight will be distributed on both feet evenly and slightly forward on the balls of your feet.
- * Avoid laziness as the game progresses; always move your feet into the proper position to set up with a wide base, the butt down and the hands out in front.
- * Follow this routine on each pitch and you’ll always be prepared to react quickly to receive the ball when it is hit.

Field

The second “F” of infield defense is “field.” Once you’ve established a good ready position that allows you to react quickly when the ball is hit, it is time to get to the ball and field it. As we discussed earlier, you want to get to the ball as quickly as you can, setting up by creating a wide base with your feet so that your butt can get down and your hands can be pushed out in front of your body. You always want to catch the ball out in front so that you can see the ball and the glove in the same view.

- * As you get to the ball, you want to make sure that your feet are wide apart to create a wide base.
- * This will allow you to get your butt down and your hands out in front so that you can see the ball and the glove in the same view.
- * Seeing the ball and the glove in the same view from the time the ball leaves the bat will allow you to be a more consistent fielder and will make it easier to react to difficult hops.
- * Creating a wide base with your feet also provides a good balance point so that you won’t tip over.
- * Some coaches ask you to get your hands out in front without talking about creating a wide base, which will cause your glove to lift off the ground and may make you tip forward.
- * A narrow stance also may make it difficult to see the ball and the glove in the same view from the time that it leaves the bat until it rolls into your glove.

Funnel

“Funnel” is the third of the 6 “Fs.” After you have established a good ready position and reacted to a batted ball, setting up in the proper position to receive the ball with a wide base, butt down and hands out in front, you should funnel the ball into your body with soft hands. After you catch the ball you want to bring it into the center of the body at chest level so that you can separate the hands and prepare to throw the ball to the appropriate teammate.

- * After fielding the ball out in front of the body, you should funnel the ball back into your body with soft hands.
- * Bring the ball to the center of the body at chest level so that you can separate the hands and prepare to throw.

- * Separate the hands with the thumbs down.
- * This gets you into a position of power, locking your front shoulder in on your target.
- * It also ensures that the angle of your elbow will be correct with the hand above the ball as the hands come apart.
- * Whenever you throw anything – a boxing punch or a bounce pass in basketball – having the thumbs down puts you in a position of power.
- * If you funnel properly and separate with the thumbs down, you should automatically get to your release point with the hand directly behind the ball, which is the best way to assure a more powerful, accurate throw.

Footwork

Technically, the third and fourth “Fs” occur at the same time. The fourth “F” is the “footwork” that is necessary to throw the ball to your target. As you funnel the ball toward your body, your feet should begin working. The goal is to generate momentum toward the target by moving your feet in that direction without crossing over. The formula for right-handed players is right foot to left and left foot to target. For lefties it is the opposite – left to right and right to target. This is the best way for you to create the two “Ds,” distance and direction in the proper angle toward the target.

- * If you funnel the ball to the center of your body properly and separate your hands with your thumbs down, you should be in the proper position to throw the ball to your target.
- * While funneling, the fourth “F” – footwork – also should be taking place
- * You should be using the proper footwork to create distance and direction to the target.
- * Move your feet in the direction of the target without crossing your feet.
- * Right-handers take the right foot toward the left and then the left toward the target.
- * Lefties take left to right and right to the target.
- * If you cross over your feet before releasing the ball, your hand can get under the ball, which puts strain on the elbow and can make the ball move during its flight toward your teammate.

Fire

The fifth “F” of infield defense is “fire.” Once you have fielded the ball, funneled it to the center of your body, separated your hands into a position of power with your thumbs down and created direction and distance toward your target, it is time to release the ball.

- * If the first four “Fs” have been completed to this point, you shouldn’t have to think about much anything other than getting rid of the ball quickly.
- * The separation of your hands with the thumbs down should have your front shoulder aligned properly and your elbow at the proper angle with the hand behind the ball.
- * Release the ball once you’ve created the proper direction and distance by moving your feet toward the target without crossing over.
- * Use a four-seam grip when throwing after the catch and always try to keep your elbow above the shoulder.

Follow

The sixth “F” of infield defense is to “follow” the throw, which helps ensure carry and accuracy. If the proper momentum has been created to establish distance and direction toward the target, the body should automatically take a few extra steps toward the target after the ball is released. If you find that you are peeling off away from the throw or not following it at all, that’s a pretty good indication that you are not generating the momentum necessary to achieve maximum carry and accuracy.

- * If the first five “Fs” have been completed to this point, your body should automatically follow the throw after the ball is released for several steps toward the intended target.
- * A proper “follow,” which is the sixth “F,” ensures that you are achieving maximum carry and accuracy.

* If you find that you are not following the throw in the direction of the target or following it at all, that is an indication that one of the first five "Fs" might need to be fixed.

Good luck,

Coach Jackson