

Fielding a Ground Ball



The picture to the left was scanned from the Davis Enterprise of the Yolo Post 77 shortstop during the 2003 season. In this picture, you can see almost every aspect of good fielding of a ground ball. Baseball is a lot of little things. This is very true when fielding a ground ball and throwing a runner out. Failure to do them all (or at least most at Little League level) results in time wasted and allowing the runner to beat a throw.

Knees bent, butt down, head up - it is very hard to get young kids to do this. The best description is to imagine sitting on a bucket. Keeping your eyes level enables you to watch the ball as it bounces to you. If you bend too much at the waist, your eyes are forced down. The feet need to be fairly far apart to squat down properly. Following are some other key aspects.

Alligator Hands

One area where precious time is lost is the transition from glove to throwing hand. In addition to helping the ball not bounce out of the glove, the "alligator" hands positions the throwing hand where it needs to be to get the ball out of the glove as quickly as possible.

Ball in the Pocket

If someone were to roll a ball to you and you are not wearing a glove, you would let it roll between your index and middle fingers and clasp with your thumb. That is exactly how you catch a ground ball wearing a glove. Unfortunately, many players have been taught to catch using very large gloves and tend to catch balls in the webbing, or ends of the fingers. In order to catch the ball in the pocket, your fingers should be point toward the ball, not down at the ground.

Hands in Front and Low

Your hands should be out in front of you, about as far as the bill of the cap, and below the ball. This is an ideal "ready" position and gets your hands closer to the ball as it approaches.

Charge the Ball

If a Little League player can run to first base in 3.5 seconds, and you wait 2.5 seconds for a ground ball to arrive, there isn't much time to throw the runner out. Note in the picture, the player is about to field the ball, yet his left foot has not been planted, indicating he was charging right up to the last possible moment.

Field the Ball in Front

It takes a tremendous amount of time to field a ball off to the glove side of the body, bring it back to the throwing hand, turn, and throw. Lessen the time by keeping your glove out in front of you as you collect the ball and bring it to your throwing hand.

Staggered Feet

The foot on the throwing side is staggered behind the glove side foot. This helps in stability of the squat, and also positions the body so the player can quickly get to the power position to throw the ball.

Open Glove

This sounds obvious, but you really need to force the glove open as wide as you can. You have probably seen advanced players pushing down on the fingers of the glove with their throwing hand. By pushing and curling the fingers, the glove widens. Hands tend to hang at your side with the palms toward the thigh. It takes some twisting to turn the palm 90 degrees.

Watch the Ball into the Glove

The picture is a bit premature to show this, but the player is clearly focused on the ball when it is within 2 feet of him.