Base running can help win or lose more games than any other phase of the offense. Good base running can create and prolong rallies. Poor base running, when fundamentals are not followed doggedly, is often a rally killer.

Solid base running maximizes the efforts of the offensive team. Aggressive and smart base runners put intense pressure on the opposition, sometimes enough pressure to cause mistakes. Alert and energetic base runners are formidable foes. Sometimes the difference between safe and out is a 10th of a second, a turn, a lead, a reaction, or a plan of action. Each plays a part in the base-running game.

Players should work persistently on their base running. Even players without great speed can become very good base runners. An aggressive but smart base runner puts pressure on the pitcher, catcher, infielders, and outfielders. All defensive positions are challenged by good base runners.

When a player is on base, the pitcher's concentration can't be singular. He must be concerned about the base runner as well as the hitter. A smart and aggressive base runner demands a good deal of the pitcher's attention. Both pitch selection and location of pitchers are sometimes affected by the base runner. If the pitcher gets too involved with the base runner, the hitter gains an edge.

Often the catcher's pitch calling becomes more predictable with runners on base. If there's a speedy runner at first, the catcher will probably call more fastballs because of the potential steal. Or he might call a pitchout, which often gives the hitter an advantage.

A good base runner can cause infielders to move out of their position sooner or force them to adjust their positioning to cover a base. This creates holes for the hitter. Fast runners force infielders to play closer to home plate and hurry their throws.

Aggressive base running also affects outfielders. They rush to get to a ball and consequently misplay it. An aggressive base runner can even alter an outfielder's normal playing position.

We tell our players to try to gain and keep an advantage on the base paths. We teach them these tips and tactics:

1. Be aggressive but smart on the bases.
2. Learn to read the pitcher (not only on base but from the dugout as well).
3. Don't fear failing. Don't be reluctant or hesitant.
4. Always think one base ahead.
5. Match base running in practice to game situations.

**COACH-BAG-COACH**

**Focus** To recognize the coach’s signal at third base, round the bag, and return on the coach’s verbal and hand signals.

**Setup** All team members should practice this procedure. The drill is best done with four to eight base runners at second base. Other players can be involved in the defensive part of the drill if the ball is live. Form a line of four to eight runners near second base on the outfield grass. The player at the front quickly moves into the baseline and becomes the runner at second base.

You can run this drill with or without defensive players. Use the playing field. You’ll need a third-
Procedure The four to eight players in line near second base take turns as a base runner at second base. Each runner should repeat the drill as a base runner several times. You can time the drill or have each player do a set number of runs.

The coach signals each base runner to round third base. As the runner proceeds toward third and approaches the base, he looks at the third-base coach, looks at the base, and then looks at the coach again. The coach will then send the runner home or have him stop and return to third. During this process, the third-base coach might bring the runner down the line toward home plate or have the runner hold and then go either way. The player follows the coach’s instruction.

Progress is measured by evaluating the runner’s reactions to the hand signals and verbal commands of the third-base coach. Communication is a prerequisite to good base running. This is a bread-and-butter communication drill.

Coaching Points Communication and reactions to both verbal and hand signals are the coaching points. At the same time, proper contact of the base and sound base-running techniques are repeated.

If a ball is hit in front of the runner, the runner decides whether to advance to third base. Our rule for the base runner and the third-base coach is to avoid making the first or third out of the inning at that base.

Modifications You can run this drill during intrasquad games or in competitive live drills.

BALL IN THE DIRT

Focus To study the pitcher’s delivery, his release point, and the flight of the ball as it travels toward home plate; to react to a low pitch that bounces in the dirt.

Setup All players should develop in this area of base running. Break the squad into offensive and partial defensive units. The defensive outfield and the third baseman become base runners and remain in that capacity throughout the drill. The offensive and defensive units alternate as base runners. A pitcher initiates the action by delivering a pitch to the plate.

Procedure A group of four to eight players alternate as base runners for this drill at first base. The key to reading a ball in the dirt is to judge the ball in flight from the pitcher’s hand. If the runner tries to get a jump based on the catcher dropping to his knees, the read comes too late.

Once the pitcher or coach throws the pitch, the runner shuffles off, reading the flight of the ball. If he thinks the ball is going to be in the dirt, he continues to shuffle and then sprints and slides into second base. If the runner hesitates, he should not go!

Coaching Points Make sure each base runner learns to read the flight of the ball and reacts to each low pitch. Success or failure is easily measured by the runner’s reaction to the pitch.

Modifications More than one group of base runners can be involved. By adding the third baseman to the defensive unit, another group of base runners can perform this drill from second base at the same time the runners at first are executing their portion of the drill. This drill can also be modified to provide base-running practice at each base—all at the same time. Designate one group as the “hot” group while the other two work independently. Those two groups perform the proper fundamentals, but the defensive unit reacts only to the “hot” group of runners.