

Bunting Drill

Since this issue of *Coach's Clipboard* features an article about our philosophy on bunting and the mechanics of the sacrifice bunt, we thought it appropriate to have the Drill of the Month for May address that topic as well. Most kids are only exposed to the fundamentals of bunting when watching big league games on TV. This is unfortunate because many big leaguers are not fundamentally sound when it comes to their approach.

For a number of players, the natural reaction when they get the bunt sign is to feel somewhat disappointed. Everyone likes to hit, so sometimes players just don't have their hearts in it when they attempt to bunt. A lot of players also try to make their bunts too perfect in hopes of getting a base hit instead of being most concerned about getting the bunt on the ground so that it is not directly at the pitcher. This drill is designed to clarify to the batter what his job is and help him practice executing the bunt.

For the mechanics of executing the sacrifice bunt, please refer to the article, *Bunting 101*, in this edition of *Coach's Clipboard*.

The Setup

A coach sets up on or near the mound with a bucket of balls, and one player steps in to the batter's box to bunt. A small cone is placed about 10 feet down the first-base line toward first base and 3 to 4 feet inside the baseline in fair territory. A second cone is placed about 4-5 feet farther into fair territory, parallel to the first cone. A third cone should be placed in a similar location to the first one but down the third-base line, with a fourth cone located 4-5 feet farther into fair territory and also parallel to the cone located down the third-base line.

The Execution

The coach acts like he is pitching from the wind-up or stretch and begins his motion. The batter pivots, shows bunt early and attempts to bunt the pitch either between the two cones on the first-base side or the two cones on the third-base side. It is okay for the coach to ask the player

to alternate from third to first base with each pitch or to bunt a few to the first-base side and then a few to the third-base side. A perfect bunt would stop about even with the cones. The coach should stress to the hitter that the bunt doesn't have to be "perfect." As long as it is pushed between the two cones located on either side of the mound it most likely will be successful. The batter wants to try to avoid placing the bunt too close to either baseline, where it can roll foul, or bunting the ball right at the pitcher.

The Why

The purpose of this drill is to have players practice the mechanics of the sacrifice bunt and develop an understanding of what the word sacrifice means – giving yourself up to move a runner over. Sometimes it is difficult for young players to understand what it means when you tell them that a bunt doesn't have to be perfect to be successful. The cones can help them better visualize this concept.

Bunting for a Hit

This drill can be used to allow players to practice bunting for a hit as well. Again, if a player has decent speed, the bunt doesn't have to stop on the foul line for it to be a hit. Disguising the bunt and making the fielders go a long way to field it are what allow a player to successfully bunt for a hit. Instead of getting too complicated, stress the same basic mechanics we discuss for the sacrifice bunt, just have the players see how long they can wait before showing bunt and still be successful. This may differ for each player.

Try This!

Turn this drill into a game. There are a couple of ways to do this. First you can give the players five pitches each and tell them to bunt the ball between the cones down the first-base line. See who has the highest score. Then do the same on the third-base side before having them but for a hit to either side. You can have a winner for each type of bunt (first- and third-base sac bunts as well as first- and third-base bunts for a hit). There also can be an overall winner.

Another variation is to play knock out. Each player gets one chance to execute a sacrifice bunt or a bunt for a hit. Those who do it successfully stay in while those who don't are knocked out and have to sit down. As the contest progresses you can have the players focus on bunting to one side of the field or the other with each pitch. The last one standing wins.

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