

When a ball is batted deep into the outfield, one of the middle fielders must sprint out toward the outfielder who is retrieving the ball. The middle fielder who does this is called the **relay** man. After retrieving the ball, the outfielder must immediately throw the ball to the relay man. It is the relay man's responsibility to make a throw to the correct base or to sprint toward the base runner, returning the ball to the infield.

The usual situation that requires a middle fielder to become a relay man is the extra-base hit. This can occur on hits that are driven into the gaps between outfielders, batted over an outfielder's head, or bounce past an outfielder after he fails to catch or stop the ball. Middle fielders must be alert to react to any of these extra-base situations and quickly move into a relay position. A ball batted to normal or shallow outfield depth does not require a relay man for the the outfield throw.

On balls that are batted to the right field side of 2nd base, the second baseman will become the relay man. On balls that are hit to the left field side of 2nd base, the shortstop will become the relay man. Balls that are hit to straight-away center field, the shortstop will be the relay man. In this instance, the shortstop must yell out to the second baseman that he is the relay man. When one of the middle fielders becomes a relay man, the other middle fielder must run to cover second base. Middle fielders must learn to react to both the outfield play and to one another's movements.

It is important for the relay man to make himself a good target for the outfielder's throw. The relay man's first thought must be to remember the position of any baserunners, including the batter, and anticipate how far the runners may be able to advance on the ball that has been hit. As the relay man runs out toward the ball, he must also move laterally to align himself with the outfielder and the base (2nd, 3rd, or home) to which the lead runner is most likely advancing. As he moves into his best relay position, the relay man should be waving his arms and yelling loudly to the outfielder, "Hit me! Hit me! Hit me!"

Outfielders should retrieve the ball quickly, and without hesitation turn to throw the ball in the direction of the relay man's voice. As soon as the outfielder locates the relay man, he must make a strong, accurate throw to the relay man that is chest high. While the throw is coming toward him, the relay man begins listening for instructions from the outfield coach or the infielders at the bases. They will be yelling what play is to be made. If a throw is to be made to a base, the relay man will hear the base being shouted. If there is no play to be made at a particular base, the relay man will hear the instruction, "Run it in!" "Run it in!"

When the instruction is to throw to a base, the relay man should be prepared to immediately relay the outfielder's throw to that base. The throw should be low and hard to the infielder covering the base. If the throw is to be directed toward home base, then the relay man should throw the ball directly to the first baseman cutoff man. In this instance, the first baseman cutoff man will be positioned in a direct line between the relay man and the catcher at home base. The relay man should throw at the cutoff man's chest.

The instruction "run the ball in" means that the relay man is to receive the outfielder's throw and immediately turn and run back toward the infield. As he does so, the relay man must locate the lead runner first, and then any other runners who are on base. He should run directly at the lead runner. If the lead base runner (or a trailing runner) has strayed too far from a base, the relay man may be able to freeze and trap the base runner by running directly at him. Once the runner is frozen, the relay man may continue to run at the baserunner to make an unassisted put out, or he may decide to throw the ball to the closest base where the base runner can be tagged out.

A relay throw is a necessary throw that is only made when there is a realistic chance of making a tag play on a base runner. There must be a definite probability that an out can be made. If the lead runner has advanced too far for a successful tag play to be made, then no throw to the lead base is the correct play. If there is a trailing runner involved, then the option exists to throw to the trailing base for a tag play on that runner. If the trailing runner is already so close to the base that a put out is unlikely, then no throw is the correct play.

Remember that a relay throw is not a desperation heave. If the throw cannot arrive at the base ahead of the runner, then there is another play to be made. In some instances, the correct throw is no throw. On every occasion when a no throw is the best throw, the relay man should quickly run the ball back into the infield. In doing so, another play may still develop.

The **cutoff** man is an infielder that moves as a target directly into the path of a ball that is thrown from the outfield to the catcher at home base. This situation occurs when the ball is batted to any outfield location, and on the hit a lead runner seeks to advance all the way to home base. Some teams choose to assign the home base cutoff responsibilities to different infielders, such as the pitcher, first baseman or third baseman. We will keep it simple. The first baseman will be our only home base cutoff man.

With runners in scoring position, or when there is a runner on first base and the batter gets an extra-base hit, the first baseman should react by moving into the cutoff position. The cutoff position for home base is approximately 40 feet in front of home plate in a direct line between the point of the outfield throw and the catcher. The first baseman should wave his arms and holler, "Hit me! hit me! hit me!" to give the outfielder or relay man an obvious target. The throw should be directed at the cutoff's chest.

The first priority on this play is to nail the runner at home base. If the throw from the outfield is strong and accurate and will reach the catcher in time to make the tag on the runner, the cutoff man will let the throw go through. If the throw is off line, short, or soft, the cutoff man automatically cuts the throw, and then makes a snap relay throw to the catcher. If the catcher thinks the throw will be too late for him to slap a tag on the runner at home base, he will direct the first baseman to cutoff the throw.

If a tag play can be made on a trailing runner at another base, the catcher shouts the base number at which a play can be made. For example, if the lead runner is already scoring and the batter is attempting to advance to second base on the throw from the outfield to home plate, the catcher shouts "2" to indicate that a play can be made on the batter at 2nd base. Clear communication between the catcher and the first baseman is essential on all home base cutoff plays.

In addition to the cutoff play at home base, we will also use a cutoff play to defend against runners advancing from first base to third base on a normal base hit to right field or center field. In this situation, the shortstop will be the cutoff man. When the ball is batted for a single into right or center field, there can either be runners at first and third base, or a lead runner at first base only.

The diagram below shows the movements of the players involved. Because the second baseman can see that the ball is hit to normal depth in right field, no relay man is needed. He sprints to cover 2nd base. The shortstop moves into position in direct alignment between the right fielder and the third baseman. He waves his arms at the right fielder to signal that he is the target for the throw. The right fielder throws through to third base by hitting the shortstop chest high with a strong accurate throw.

With the play in front of him, the shortstop can let the throw go through, cut off an errant throw and relay it to third base, or cut the throw and make a play on the batter seeking to advance to second base on the throw in from the outfield. The cutoff play is the same for a single that is hit into center field, except the shortstop will make a different alignment. With the shortstop as an alert cutoff, there will be opportunities to put a runner out at third, second, or even first base. Keys to getting an out with this play are alertness and effective communication between the middle fielders.

