

LESSON 3: FIELDING GROUND BALLS AND DECISION MAKING ON DEFENSE

Grade-Level Outcomes

Primary Outcomes

Offensive skills: Executes at least one of the following designed to create open space during small-sided game play: pivots, fakes, jab steps. (S1.M6.7)

Catching: Catches, with a mature pattern, from different trajectories using a variety of objects in small-sided game play. (S1.M21.7)

Reducing space: Selects the correct defensive play based on the situation (e.g., number of outs). (S2.M11.7)

Embedded Outcome

Working with others: Problem-solves with a small group of classmates during adventure activities, small-group initiatives or game play. (S4.M5.7)

Lesson Objectives

The learner will:

- demonstrate techniques (pivot, fake, jab step) to avoid being tagged at least two out of three times during the pickle or trickle game.
- demonstrate proper ground-ball fielding technique, using all critical elements of a mature pattern during partner fielding practice tasks.
- make appropriate decisions when playing defense for a tag out during the one player game application.

Equipment and Materials

- Ball options: tennis balls, Wiffle balls, racquetballs, foam balls, etc.
- Four-base grid options: bases spray-painted on grass, rubber bases, poly spots
- Cones
- Pedometers

Introduction

Begin with a review of tagging unforced runners. Invite four skilled students to demonstrate the pickle game. After the runner returns to the base of origin, advances to the next base, or is tagged out, ask questions about the strategy of both the defensive players and the runner. Explain that, later in the lesson, students also will practice fielding ground balls. Ask students, “If you hit a high percentage of ground balls as a batter, do you think you will be very successful? Why or why not?” “If you can field ground balls well, your team will have a better chance of getting batters out.” Provide an individual step-count goal.

Instructional Task: Review Tagging Unforced Runners

■ PRACTICE TASK

In ability groups of four, play the pickle game from Lesson 2.

Do not allow sliding or diving into a base. Emphasize that the tagger should stand outside of the baseline to avoid collisions.

Refinements

- Defense: Make the runner commit. Throw the ball with just a wrist snap. As a receiver, call for the ball.
- Runner: Don't commit to a base until the defense makes you go that way. Avoid a tag by ducking and rolling under the non-ball side of the defender.

Student Choices/Differentiation

- The group of four should choose the type of ball they would like to use and also choose the distance between the two bases.
- Groups of students at the utilization or proficiency level of what Graham, Holt/Hale, and Parker refer to as the generic levels of skill development (GLSP) (2012) could be invited to try trickle, in which one more base is added to form a triangle. At least four defenders are needed along with two runners.

What to Look For

Critical elements for defenders:

1. Run fast to cover the base.
2. Keep the ball high (throwing hand).
3. Use a dart throw.
4. Follow your throw.

Critical elements for runners:

1. Watch the ball.
2. Change directions when the defenders throw the ball.
3. Use a fake, pivot, or jab step to avoid the tag.

Instructional Task: Fielding Ground Balls

■ PRACTICE TASK

Demonstrate technique for fielding grounders.

Guiding questions for students:

- Ask questions about specific aspects of fielding ground balls (e.g., How did Mary have her feet when she was waiting for the ball?).
- Follow up the response with a "why" question (e.g., Why should Mary's feet be spaced wide apart?).

Continue by demonstrating the movement needed when a ball is coming at a fielder to one side or the other (shuffle or slide if ball is close; cross over and square up if not close).

Extensions

- Triangles: In partners about 5 feet (1.5 m) apart with a ball of choice, one student rolls a grounder directly at the partner, who is kneeling with knees apart and hands out in front. (The knees form the base of the triangle, and the hands are the point of the triangle.) Partner fields the ball and tosses the ball back. Repeat 10 times and switch.
- Two-ball pick-up: In partners with two balls of choice, one student rolls a grounder just to the side of the partner, making him slide over to field it. Fielder underhand tosses the ball back to the partner. Tosser immediately rolls the second ball to the opposite side, making the fielder slide over to field it between the feet and toss it back. Tosser immediately rolls the other ball back to the other side and continues for 10 pick-ups. Partners switch.
- Two-ball pick-up extended: Same as two-ball pick-up but the ball is rolled farther out to the side, making the fielder use a crossover step to get to the ball. After 10 pick-ups, partners switch.

Refinement

Keep both palms open to the oncoming ball. When moving to the side, keep your shoulders square to the ball. Stay low while moving to the ball.

Student Choices/Differentiation

- Partners should choose the type of ball they want to use in the fielding activities.
- Partners can determine the distance apart they want to be.
- Partners can determine the speed at which the balls are thrown during the pick-up activities.

What to Look For

Critical elements for fielding ground balls:

- Assume a low ready position with feet apart.
- Both hands are out in front forming a triangle, with the feet as the base and the hands as the point.
- “Alligator”(the fielder places one hand under the ball to scoop it and uses the other hand to clamp down on the ball to secure it, like an alligator’s jaw) the ball and absorb it into the body.
- Crow-hop and transfer into throwing position.
- Is the force or speed of the throws or tosses appropriate for the skill of the receiver?
- Are students looking to see that the receiver is ready before throwing?

Instructional Task: Game Application—Combining Fielding, Throwing, Catching, and Tagging Runners

■ PRACTICE TASK

Explain and demonstrate the game.

Emphasize correct fielding and tagging technique, along with running strategy.

One Player

- Form teams of six to eight students.
- One player begins in the field, while the remaining players are members of the offensive team.
- One person on the offensive team throws a ground ball into the field (four bases at skill-appropriate distance).
- The whole offensive team then runs the bases behind the batter.
- The base runners can pass one another as they round the bases, but stopping on the bases is not allowed.
- Cones can be used to represent the bases, and the runners just run past them.
- After the ball is thrown, the defensive player retrieves the ball and begins to tag runners with the ball.
- As runners are tagged, they immediately become part of the defensive team and assist in tagging other runners.
- When runners reach home, they are safe.
- When *all* runners reach home, a new “batter” starts the process again, with all of the tagged players helping in the field as part of the defensive team.
- Eventually, there will be a team of fielders with only one batter.
- This batter then becomes the new defensive player for the next game.

Give safety reminders for runners to look where they are going and avoid other runners.

Set up playing areas so they radiate out from a central open space.

Refinement

Defense: Get in a low ready position to field a ground ball. Before the ball is thrown, look to see how you could assist the person who fields the ball or what you will do with the ball if you field it. Make the runners change directions to make a tag on their backs and avoid collisions.

EMBEDDED OUTCOME: S4.M5.7. After a few turns, stop and ask questions about the defensive strategies that were successful or the strategies that could be implemented to be more successful getting runners out. Allow time for students to talk with a partner, and then suggest ideas to the class. Continue play.

Student Choices/Differentiation

- The student who is throwing can choose the type of ball to throw. Available options should include balls that have a limited flight.
- Rather than throwing, the offensive player can hit off a tee, hit a soft toss, or fungo hit.
- Begin the game with a skilled player as the lone defensive player.
- More than one player can begin on defense if it is too difficult to get runners out.
- Make the distance between bases greater if it is too easy to get runners out; make the distance shorter if it is too difficult to get runners out.

What to Look For

Critical elements for defenders:

- Use correct fielding technique for ground balls.
- Make appropriate decisions about which runners to attempt to tag.
- Use proper tagging technique.
- Successful cooperation among defensive players allows for tagging multiple runners.

Critical elements for runners:

- Watch the ball.
 - Change directions when the defenders throw the ball.
 - Use a fake, pivot, or jab step to avoid the tag.
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Formal and Informal Assessments

Student self-assessment of fielding critical elements in the lesson closure

Closure

- Ask students about defensive decisions when playing the one player game (e.g., If the fielder picks up the ball on the left side of the field, what should she do?).
- When the “one player” has tagged one runner and now there are two players on defense, what can they do to get more runners out?
- How many defensive players would be ideal to be very effective at getting runners out?
- Have students complete a written self-assessment of fielding using a rating scale. Rate yourself on each of the critical elements of fielding as follows: (1) This part is easy for me. (2) I have to concentrate to be able to do this part. (3) I need more practice on this part.
 - Assume low ready position with feet apart.
 - Both hands are out in front with palms up.
 - “Alligator” the ball and absorb it into the body.
 - Crow-hop and transfer into throwing position.

Reflection

- After two lessons that include tagging an unforced runner, are students progressing in their understanding and demonstration of defensive strategies?
- What is their level of ability in fielding ground balls?
- Is continued practice with the isolated skill needed, or can students combine the skill with throwing and apply the skills in game-like situations?

Homework

Ask students to update their physical activity logs.

Play one of the games taught in today's lesson with a friend or family member.

Resources

Bailey, J. (2008). Rundowns in physical education? Try the tactical approach. *Strategies*, 22(2), 10-12.

Graham, G. (2008). *Teaching children physical education: Becoming a master teacher*. 3rd ed. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics. (CFUs)

Potter, D.L., & Johnson, L. (2007). *Teaching softball: Steps to success*. 3rd ed. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Internet keyword search: "fungo hitting," "soft toss hitting"