

COVERING SECOND BASE

Second base is the crossroads of a baseball field. Not only is it right in the middle, but when a runner reaches second the offensive team has someone in *scoring position*, ready to go home on a routine single to the outfield. Often when a pitcher throws a shutout, sportswriters will point out that only one or two runners made it to second during the whole game. Ideally your defense will allow no base runners at all, but the fewer runners that reach second, the harder it will be for the opposing team to score. And if they can't score, they can't win.

The second baseman and the shortstop share the responsibility of covering second base. Talk to one another, so you know what you're both going to do.

It's also important to back each other up, especially on steals. If you aren't backing up and the ball squirts away, the base runner will usually have an easy time going to third. Solid defense up the middle saves runs.

WHO COVERS SECOND?

When the runner on first tries to steal second, either the shortstop or the second baseman can cover second base. You have to decide before the play who will take the throw.

Many big-league middle infielders set up a signal they flash before each play to indicate who will cover. To shield the sign the shortstop holds his glove in front of his face. If he opens his mouth, the second baseman will cover second. If he keeps it closed, he covers.

Usually, it's the second baseman's job if the batter is right-handed and the shortstop's job if the batter is left-handed. You generally play the batter to pull the ball a little. This way the closest fielder covers.

There are times, however, when you'll want to ignore this rule. One such situation is when the pitcher has a good fastball and the batter is having a hard time getting around on it. Since the batter is more likely to hit the ball the opposite way, you may want to reverse the assignments.

Another time you may change assignments is when you suspect a bunt is on. Since the second baseman must run over to cover first on a bunt, in bunt situations the shortstop should cover second if there's an attempted bunt.

MAKING THE TAG



When the steal is on if you're covering second, you should run as fast as you can to the base and

Catch the ball and place your glove right in front of the base, with the back side facing the runner. In this position the runner will have to touch your glove to touch the base. It also makes it much more difficult for the runner to kick the ball loose. Once you make the tag pull your hand up quickly to avoid injury. Don't swipe at the runner. It's easier to miss the tag if you move your glove.

When the throw is coming from right field or right center field on a tag play, the infielder (usually the shortstop, because the second baseman is the relay man positioned in short right field) gets in the same position and makes the tag the same way as he does on steals.

On throws coming from left field and left center field, the second baseman usually takes the throw because the shortstop is the relay man positioned in short left field. Stand on the outfield side of the bag, with your left foot next to the base and your right foot toward the fielder making the throw. Keep your knees bent and your body low. After you catch the ball, quickly turn and put your glove right in front of the base the same way you do on the steal. If the throw is good and you're in the proper position, you should almost be on your knees. Once you make the tag, pull your hand up quickly to avoid injury.

BACKING UP

Always back each other up, but be careful not to back up too closely. You don't want a bad throw to go by you, too. If you're not the fielder making the play, run about twenty to thirty feet behind the base. If the ball is overthrown or bounces past the covering fielder, you'll be able to field it quickly and keep the runner from advancing to third.