DOUBLE PLAY DEPTH
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When we talk about the infield at double play depth, we’re referring to the middle infielders. In order to consider double play depth, these conditions must exist. There must be a runner on first base and fewer than two outs. Let’s throw out the formulas for where to play. If, for example, you’re playing second base, you know that you have to come up and over toward second base to complete the double play if a ground ball is hit. Now, look at your off-infielders – the shortstop and the third baseman. These are the guys who are going to be involved on a double play ball. Ask yourself, “If that ball is hit hard – a sharp, two-hop ground ball to my shortstop – can I get to second base in my proper set-up position and be a target for my shortstop?” If the ball is a hard-hit two-hopper to shortstop, if it’s a firm two-hopper – not a rocket – and you can’t get there, if you’re still on the move when he’s ready to throw, then automatically you would tell yourself that your double play depth is not correct. You need to move in and over a little bit.

There’s a comfort zone for each infielder who plays the middle. One players’ double play depth might be three steps in and three over. Another guy’s might be two in and two over, so you must ask yourself as a middle infielder, “Can I get to second base, set up in the right manner, and be a good target for my shortstop if he gets a firm two-hopper hit to him?” That’s your simple formula for double play depth.

As a second baseman you’re going to take a direct route to the bag, so when you get there you’re in perfect position to receive the throw. You’re going to put your left foot on the bag, and your shoulders should be square to the shortstop or ready, anticipating a bad throw, because if you anticipate a bad throw and a good throw, it’s a piece of cake. But if you do it the opposite way – you’re anticipating a good throw as opposed to a bad throw – you become surprised if it’s in the dirt and therefore you can’t react to the ball as well. If you use the proper footwork, you’ll align yourself to throw to first base in the right manner, with your front shoulder pointing toward first base as you throw there.

On the shortstop side the same principles apply. You need to get to the base to record the out. You need to get there early just like the second baseman does. You have a little more leeway than he does because your momentum is toward first base, when you’re going to throw the ball. We’re not telling you to get there late, but you can see based on all the principles we’re talking about that you’re coming in a direct line and you don’t have to worry about changing your momentum. What you do have to worry about is slowing down as you approach second base. You want to put your right foot on the bag.

The reason you want to get there early is so you can help out on a bad throw and you can get your footwork crisp so you can take your left foot to the ball. Taking your left foot to the ball puts your body in a position to throw. Don’t be lazy getting to the bag, if you’re moving at all and there’s a bad throw, you’re not in a position to react. If you catch it with two hands, you’re not wasting any effort or any time. You can transfer the ball to your bare hand make the throw much more quickly. The advantages of having your bare hand and glove together are that it shortens the turn, it makes the transition from your glove to your hand easier, and it gets you in a good position to make a strong, accurate throw.

The shortstop should look at the second baseman and at the first baseman. If there’s a man on first and no one else on, the first baseman is going to be holding the runner. So it might be a little tighter for you. Look at the second baseman and say to yourself, “If there’s a two-hopper hit right at my second baseman, can I get to second, set up in the proper manner, and be a good, stationary target for my second baseman?”

Remember that defense is two parts: catching and throwing. If we’re having a catch in the backyard, we’re not throwing to a guy who’s running post patterns or out patterns. We’re playing catch with someone whose shoulders are square to us. We see the chest, and that’s what we want to throw to. The double play is no different. If we eliminate throwing to people when they’re moving, we’re going to be a better ball club because we’re going to play catch better.