

## What are Scouts Looking For? (Outfielders)

### What are Scouts and College Coaches Looking for in Outfielders?

As the last line of defense on a baseball field, outfielders play a crucial role in determining the number of runs the opposing team scores throughout a game and the number of bases a runner advances on a given hit. Although there are many factors that can determine the outcome of a game, outfield defense is one that is often overlooked or discarded as ultimately irrelevant by the layperson. Given the fact that many contests throughout the course of a year are decided by a poor read on a ball, a bad throw or a missed cut-off man, it is ironic that outfield defense is arguably the most under-taught aspect of high school baseball. As a result of this general lack of focus on detailed outfield play, it becomes difficult for high school outfielders to know exactly what they can work on to be more marketable in the eye of the professional scout or college coach.

While offensive prowess is obviously very important for a scout or coach in assessing the overall ability of an outfielder, defensive aptitude is equally significant in their evaluation. There are many skills that are vital components of an outfielder's game.

**Speed:** Great speed allows an outfielder to track down difficult fly balls or cut off hard hit ground balls in the gap. Some outfielders, such as former major leaguer Deion Sanders, have great "recovery" speed, which allows them to get away with a poor read or first step, but still recover in time to make the play. Although, speed is largely a talent you are born with, it can be improved through intensive work on running form, plyometrics to increase explosion, and various forms of resistance training (i.e. a speed parachute). Speed and athleticism often go hand in hand, but it is possible for a player to have great speed and only fair athleticism. Likewise, a player may be a very good athlete but have below average speed.

**Athletic Ability:** Does the outfielder show athleticism through his actions? Is body control evident in his movements or does he look awkward/unsure when running, catching and throwing? Does he run on the balls of his feet rather than his heels? Natural athleticism is not something that can be learned, but an outfielder can become more skilled through position-specific drill work.

**Reads, Jumps, Angles & Instincts:** It is very possible for an outfielder to have only average speed, but make tremendous reads on the ball off the bat and therefore excel at the position. Outfielders who make great reads and show exceptional instincts are able to break to the ball before contact is made. This is because they understand the different types of swings-when a hitter is likely to pull the ball, cut under it, get jammed by it, reach for it or hit it to the opposite field. The best outfielders pick up hitter tendencies and make adjustments to their positioning accordingly. Playing balls live off the bat during batting practice is the single best way to improve reads, angles and jumps in the outfield. Outfielders should treat BP as a time to make themselves better rather than standing around talking to their friends.

**Arm Strength & Arm Action:** For many, there is nothing prettier to watch in baseball than an outfielder that has a cannon for an arm who can pin a throw on his intended target. Vladimir Guerrero, Raul Mondesi and Ichiro Suzuki have three of the strongest, loosest arms in the game and are able to routinely throw out advancing base runners or eliminate a coach's plan to have a runner take the extra base in a crucial situation. Scouts and college coaches judge arm strength by evaluating the plane of a thrown ball and what the ball does when it hits the ground. Does the ball rainbow out of the hand and die weakly when it hits the ground or does the ball stay on a tight line and "take off" toward the target when it hits the ground? It is possible for a player to have a strong arm but not achieve great carry on the ball because of a poor release point, improper arm action or lack of backspin on the ball. To maximize overall throwing ability, it is important to throw with the fingers on top of the ball with a four-seam grip and work for maximum extension with the arm, culminating in a proper release point out in front of the landing foot. This way, the ball will be more likely to explode out of the hand and less likely to tail away from the target.

**Steps:** Does the outfielder show a quick first step in the correct direction of the baseball? Once a fly ball or ground ball hits the outfielders glove, can he release it after taking just one power crow-hop or power shuffle through the ball? Does he waste time taking unnecessary steps to throw? · **Fielding Position:** Does the outfielder get glove and body in the best position when fielding ground balls and fly balls?

**Explosion to Ball, Momentum Through Ball:** Outfielders at any position need to take a go-go-go approach to fielding every ball so they can create momentum through the ball toward their target, helping eliminate the need for extra steps. A go-stop-go approach is common in high school outfielders, but can often be remedied with a more aggressive mentality.

**Hustle & Attitude:** The manner in which a player hustles or plays the game and how he carries himself on the field are extremely important to scouts and coaches. No scouts or coaches enjoy watching talented players who

are lazy, cocky, throw helmets, or lose control in the face of adversity. On the contrary, if two players are equally talented, but one sprints on and off the field, runs full speed down the first base line every time, makes hard turns around first to pressure the defense after a hit, and stands on second base after hitting a routine pop-up to the outfield, that player will grade much higher on a scout's report.

There are many facets within the game of baseball that cannot be controlled, but hustle, love of the game, determination, strength in the face of adversity and a positive attitude are a few that can. Ability is very important to coaches and scouts, but it is not everything. If you play the game hard and you play the game right, you will, at very least, be noticed.

**For more information on scouting or other related topics, please send emails to [newsletter@baseballfactory.com](mailto:newsletter@baseballfactory.com) or to speak with a Baseball Factory Representative call 800.641.4487.**