



BASIC
Baseball
STRATEGY



AN INTRODUCTION FOR COACHES AND PLAYERS

S. H. FREEMAN *Foreword by* **STAN MUSIAL**

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S. H. FREEMAN

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FOREWORD

To put first things first, I'd like to make it plain that I believe playing baseball should be fun, especially for the young. For their individual development, as well as for the enjoyment of doing for themselves and by themselves, they should have the minimum of parental playing-field supervision and adult instruction.

It's absolutely essential that boys—and girls, if they're part of the gang or playing softball among themselves—spend their early years learning to swing a bat and catch a ball. The fundamentals (and the fun) must come first.

There is a time, though, when the pride of performance becomes important. That's when the other things come in that are vital to better—and winning—baseball.

Even before my appointment as special consultant to the president, I'd known the value of physical fitness to playing better and longer. Because my father believed in the old-world turnverein [i.e., gymnastics clubs] idea, gymnastics gave me a strong body. And to play superior baseball, it's necessary to develop strength, coordination, and stamina.

Baseball is a game of thinking, too. The physical *and* the mental aspects make for winning. A winning player learns to anticipate plays afield so he'll throw to the correct base if the ball is hit to him. He learns how to execute relay throws and how to hit the cutoff man. And he remembers to hus-

tle and back up his teammates to prevent disaster in case of an overthrow.

A winning player learns to bunt because baseball is a team game. He learns how and when to run the bases, when to be daring and when to be cautious. And he learns how to slide properly, to avoid the tag as well as an injury that could take him out of the lineup.

I played against and for one of the shortest men ever to play in the big leagues—Eddie Stanky. Eddie made himself a winner. He learned to crouch and to foul off pitches so that he could wheedle walks. He became adept at executing the hit-and-run play. He proved that the finer points can mean so much—like hitting the ball to the right side of the infield with none out so that a teammate on second base can take third, where he can score on a fly ball.

Eddie Stanky, who didn't have as much basic talent as many players, played on three pennant-winning teams in three different cities by emphasizing tactics, strategy, and team baseball. Baseball is, as I was saying, a physical and mental game. Playing should be fun. I know winning is.

—*Stan Musial*

PREFACE

The purpose of this book is to help coaches and managers better understand correct offensive and defensive baseball technique and strategy. It is important for coaches to acknowledge that hitting, throwing, and catching are integral parts of the game, but just part of the whole picture. The proper execution of offensive and defensive situations is vital for the entire coaching picture to evolve.

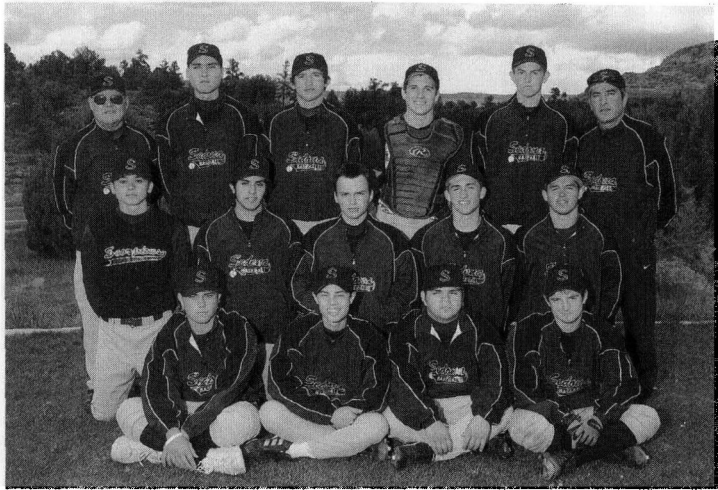
The strategy and play situations that you are to analyze and understand are exactly the same whether the game is played in Yankee Stadium or in a local ballpark. After viewing some games of the week on national television, it has occurred to me that a copy of *Basic Baseball Strategy* might be an excellent Christmas gift for some big-league managers.

The tips at the end of each chapter are summaries of the important points for you to remember and emphasize. As a college baseball coach I would instruct and drill our players in these same fundamentals. I found myself answering the very same questions your players might be asking. I hope those answers will be here for you.

The supply of professionally trained teachers and coaches was never intended to be directed at the youth sports programs. For more than a half century, parent-coaches have admirably picked up the slack. They have organized, equipped, and maintained amateur baseball teams and ball-

parks. Clinics sponsored by civic groups, recreation departments, colleges, and professional teams have helped to further hone their knowledge and technique of coaching baseball. It is my wish that this book might continue to help lighten your load and make coaching baseball more fun for you and the players.

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Sedona Red Rock High School baseball team
(photo by Ron Christopher)

Thanks are in order for the support of Sedona Red Rock High School principal Russell Snider, athletic director John Parks, and the members of the baseball team. I wish to recognize Andrew Hreha, photographer, who is also a student at SRRHS and who works magic with his digital camera. Best wishes to you in your chosen profession. I would also like to acknowledge the artistic contributions from my wife, Elsie. And, finally, a special thanks to Mark Weinstein, my most patient editor at McGraw-Hill.

CONTENTS

Foreword by Stan Musial v

Preface vii

Acknowledgments ix

PART 1 OFFENSIVE STRATEGY 1

- 1 The Take 3
- 2 The Sacrifice 7
- 3 The Steal 11
- 4 The Hit-and-Run 15
- 5 The Squeeze Play 19
- 6 How to Determine Batting Order 23
- 7 Running and Coaching the Bases 27
- 8 The Signs 39

PART 2 DEFENSIVE STRATEGY 43

- 9 Cutoff Plays 45
- 10 Relay Throws 51
- 11 Defense Against the Sacrifice 57
- 12 The Pitcher Fielding His Position 63
- 13 Defense Against the Steal,
Delayed Steal, and Squeeze Play 67
- 14 Defensive Positions for
Infielders and Outfielders 73

- 15 Some Hints for Pitchers and Catchers 81
- 16 Field Size, Field Conditions, and Weather 87

**PART 3 PHYSICAL AND
MENTAL PREPARATION 93**

- 17 Physical and Mental Mistakes 95
- 18 Players' Attitudes on the Field 105
- 19 Offensive and Defensive Drills 109
- 20 A Tour of the Bases 121

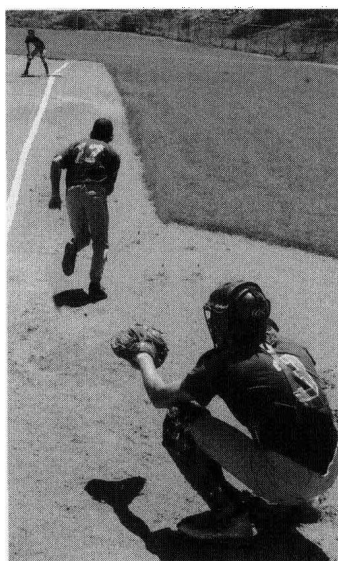
The Last Word 131

Index 133

1

PART

OFFENSIVE STRATEGY



Unfortunately, many youth coaches and even professional managers define offensive baseball as simply batting the ball and running the bases. Well-coached teams are exposed to the *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* of every aspect of the offensive game. For example, *Basic Baseball Strategy* explains when and why to take a pitch, when and how to

execute a steal or a hit-and-run, and the proper way to lead off and run the bases. It is important that coaches and managers understand the strengths and weaknesses of all their players. However, every team at every level should be able to understand and execute the basics offered in this book.

1

CHAPTER



THE TAKE

WHY WE TAKE A PITCH

The “take” sign tells your batter that he must not swing at the ball regardless of where the pitch might be. The purpose of the take is to make the pitcher work a little harder. If the pitcher is wild and can’t get the ball over the plate, it would not be wise for the batter to help him regain his control and confidence by swinging at the first pitch. Another take situation might find your team behind. Base runners are needed. A base runner scoring from a walk is contributing as much as a player who hits a home run. Your team can’t score runs without base runners. Taking pitches in certain situations can help players get on base and win games.

WHEN TO TAKE A PITCH

Four game situations should determine when your batter should take a pitch:

- **The score.** If your team is behind by three or more runs, your batter should not swing at a ball until the pitcher has thrown a strike. It's the "making the pitcher work" strategy. A series of walks can demoralize a team in the field faster than any other play.
- **The hitter.** An exception to this rule would occur if your team has tying or catch-up runs on base with runners at least on second and third. In this situation, if one of your better hitters is at bat, he might be allowed to swing at a "good" pitch.
- **Pitcher's control.** When a pitcher is wild, regardless of the score, it would be wise for your batter to take a pitch.
- **The inning.** Regardless of the inning, when your team is behind, base runners are needed in order to get back in the game. Swinging at the first pitch helps the pitcher. It is even more important in the later innings. The starting pitcher would be getting tired; a relief pitcher might be wild.

There are specific ball and strike situations when your batter should be looking for a take sign: 0-0, 1-0, 2-0, 3-0,

3-1. The take sign should never be given when your batter is behind in the count. Rather than stand perfectly still when taking a pitch, the batter might fake a bunt. This can possibly unnerve the pitcher and cause the infielders to change their positions. However, it is best not to move around too much as it might be a distraction to the umpire.



===== **TIPS** =====

- ◆ Your players should know and understand the ball and strike count for the take situation.
- ◆ Have your batter stand up ready to hit and then fake a bunt, even though the take is on. Make the pitcher work for his strike.
- ◆ Understand the possible take situations: the pitcher is wild or your team is behind.

2

CHAPTER

THE SACRIFICE

WHY WE SACRIFICE

The sacrifice play is an attempt to bunt the ball down either baseline in order to move a runner or runners into scoring position. We give up an out when we sacrifice; it's for the good of the team. By sacrificing, or bunting, there is less chance of hitting into a double play. A good bunt is difficult to defend against; thus, it becomes a doubly important offensive play. A player with good speed and a solid bunting technique can be an excellent offensive weapon and can "drag bunt" for a base hit without a sign from the coach. When your players attempt to bunt, be sure that they attack only low pitches. The high pitch is easily popped up.