

TORRE'S TAKE

with Joe Torre

Base Running

Proper base running technique is critical in creating scoring opportunities for your offense. A batter should know when to make a straight break for first base, and when to round first in anticipation of a possible double, or even a triple. An awareness of ball position informs a batter as to their best strategy for getting on base safely, while quick and purposeful running aids in maximizing base position on a good hit.

Baseball can be a game of inches and hustling down the line can make the difference between being safe and being out. Teach players to always run hard for first, and don't stop until they have hit the bag or the umpire has called them out. Even on routine grounders, pop flies, or throws to first, fielders make mistakes and players must always be in position to capitalize.

Now, let's look at the proper technique a batter should execute when running to first base.

After you make contact, drive your back foot towards first base and begin your sprint. (SCREEN #1) Look to find the baseball after three steps toward first base, but do not watch the ball. Focus on where you are running and continue sprinting as fast as you can. Watch your foot hit the first base bag, and then look to the right for an overthrow. If an overthrow has been committed, be ready to make a break for second, taking care to follow any direction from the base coach. If there is no opportunity to advance past first base, break down after you pass the bag by lowering your hips and chopping your steps.

If the batter gets the ball through the infield, and feels that the possibility of making it past first base is good, he or she should do the following:

Take the proper angle on your way to first base for a possible extra base hit. This is critically important as it can mean the difference between a single and a double or a double and a triple.

After you see the ball go through the infield, begin your banana turn, (SCREENSHOT #2) going to the outside of first base to ensure a straight line to second base. Push off the front inside corner of the bag and sprint hard. (SCREENSHOT #3) You can use the corner of the base like a sprinter uses starting blocks and propel yourself toward second base.

Be sure to continue on to second base on a certain double. If the defense is preparing to make a tag at second as you approach, be ready to execute a slide, starting into it a couple of paces from the bag. If the ball is already secured by the defense after you round first, plant your lead foot and return to first base (SCREENSHOT #4). It is important to always think double on a strong hit past the infield.

Teaching the proper base running techniques will result in more of your players getting on base, and subsequently more opportunities to score runs. With practice, players will develop a sense for when to focus on getting to first base safely, and when to go for extra bases. No matter what, ensure that your batters immediately sprint to first after a hit and keep a constant hustle until the play has ended. Smart base runners do not take unnecessary risks, but also don't let a chance to advance a base go to waste because of a lack of speed, commitment, or awareness. Reward your players who give great effort in running the bases and who mentally are aware of the proper course of action when running the bases.

