



Competitive Challenges for Practice

Skill challenges are a great way to keep practices exciting, fun, and competitive while creating pressure for athletes. For each of the following challenges, begin with a prescribed amount of conditioning for the team. Each time a player successfully completes a task, take one repetition of conditioning away for the entire team.

Long Tee Challenge

Set up a tee at one end of the cage. Their goal is to hit a line drive off the back of the cage. Each time they hit a line drive off the back of the cage, take a sprint away.

EXTENSION: Set up a ball on a tee at the other end of the cage. If they knock the ball off the tee, they have no conditioning. To add an interesting twist, if they knock the ball off the tee, have the coaches do all the conditioning.

Bunting Challenge

Set up cones about four feet off each foul line. Players are to sacrifice bunt between the cones and the foul line. Take one sprint away for each successful bunt.

Catcher Blocking Challenge

Draw a circle around home plate in the dirt (approximately 6-8 feet in diameter). Throw balls in the dirt for the catcher to block. Their goal is to block the ball, scramble to their feet and get the ball back in their hands before the ball leaves the circle. Each time they accomplish this goal, take a sprint away.



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Pitcher/Catcher to 2nd base

Pitchers deliver a pitch from the stretch, the catcher receives it and throws to second base. Their goal is for this combined time to be less than 3.5 seconds (at the high school level).

When doing this challenge, be careful that your players don't "cheat" by not using proper mechanics on the mound or by jumping out early behind the plate. If they cheat, count it as an unsuccessful try.

Bunt Defense Challenge

Your infielders (pitchers and catchers included) have to get an out on each of your types of bunt defense. In addition to just getting an out, they must also have everyone in the correct spot and communicate appropriately.

Around the World Infield Challenge

Begin with 8-10 infielders at first base. Similar to the "Around the world" tactical game, have infielders field a ground ball and move to the next position to their right. For every infielder who gets to and fields a ball cleanly at third base with no bobbles or errors along the way, take a sprint away.

Outfield or Outfielder/Infielder Communication Challenge

Do not do this challenge until you have worked quite a bit on fly ball communication because there is the potential for collisions in this drill.

Begin with two lines of outfielders about 100 feet apart. Designate one line as the centerfielder and one line as the left or right fielder (depending on the side you designate as centerfielders). This is important so that they know which line has priority when calling the ball.



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A player from each line starts sprinting toward the middle. When they are about 50 feet apart, the coach throws a fly ball between the two outfielders. A successful repetition is a fly ball that is caught without the outfielders colliding. Take away a sprint for a successful rep.

This challenge can also be done between infielders and outfielders.

Pitcher Strike challenge

Begin with 8 or 10 sprints. Each time a pitcher throws a strike, take one away. Coaches can determine the types of pitches thrown or allow the pitchers to choose. Pitchers need to throw at or near maximum velocity.

Line Drive or Opposite Field Challenge

This can be done in a cage or on the field. Have a coach throwing short toss (40 feet for high school age). Begin with a specified number of sprints. For each line drive (or ball hit to the opposite field if doing the opposite field challenge) take one away. The coach is the judge of what is a line drive or not. If you are doing the opposite field version of this, set up cones on the field to determine what is the opposite field.

Straight Steal Challenge

Determine the amount of time you would like your players straight steal from the first movement of the pitcher until they get to the base at second (3.5 or 3.6 seconds is a good time for a high school player, but times will vary by age). Also be sure to select players who are capable of achieving the time you selected. It does no good to select players who aren't very fast and will not be straight stealing very often.



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The coach should start the watch when the pitcher makes their first move, and stop the watch when the runner hits second base. Reaching second base in the goal time or under is considered a success. Not reaching in the allotted time or getting picked off would not be considered a success. Take a sprint off for each successful repetition.

Outfielder Throwing Challenge

Set up a net or player at an appropriate distance from your outfielders. Have them field a ground ball or fly ball and make a throw on the fly to the net or player. Each time they hit the net or player on the fly, take a sprint away.

Change the challenge by having them throw toward different bases from different positions in the outfield.

General advice_

Cornerstone does not believe in conditioning as punishment, but the reality is that baseball players do need conditioning. Simply allow players to decrease the amount of conditioning by accomplishing skills that you deem important.

I recommend having the whole team around watching the challenge. This increases the intensity and helps your players learn to perform in pressure situations. Also, feel free change the level of success and difficulty in your individual challenges to meet the needs and skill level of your players. Ideally, the challenges should be difficult, but attainable. A quality challenge will allow the players to reduce their conditioning by about a half. Be prepared for your players to do no conditioning on any given day if they perform the challenge well.