

From the Dugout

This Week's question.

The tandem cut. We were running the drill with a runner on 1st and a batter. The ball was being hit to the fence. Defense was trying to get the runner at home and keep the batter from getting to 3B.

Typically, on plays to home, we have our corners as the relay. In this situation, though, with a tandem cut in order, would the relays to home change? In other words, are the middle infielders always the tandem with 3B covering 3B and 1B trailing the batter? If so, does this then mean that the corners are the relay to home only when there is a runner in scoring position and the ball is hit in front of/to the outfielder?

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The tandem relay:



Matt, this is a great question! I did an analysis on this exact situation a few years ago. See below and let me know what you think....

I examined the reasons why I would want the shortstop and second baseman to be the tandem. For me, I like my middle infielders to be my most athletic players. For a successful tandem relay, a fielder has to possess the athletic feet to move for an errant throw from the outfielder and to get lined up for the throw home; the quickest hands for a fast ball-transfer; and possess the strongest arm to make the 150 to 180 foot throws. I feel these are my middle infielders. Some coaches put a weaker arm at second –

but I like to recruit a high school shortstop to play second (because he is usually the best athlete on the team and possess the attributes I mentioned above). Sure, it is great if third basemen possess these attributes too. I ran several timed tests and found the faster stop watch times were with both middle infielders. They also scored better with more accurate relays and less balls dropped or mishandled on the transfer. Plus, I figure if the major leagues do it, I probably shouldn't re-invent the wheel. Now if your third basemen are better ball handlers than your second basemen, then you might want to consider this in your defensive plan.

As far as the ball down the right field line, this one could go either way. Some teams do use the first baseman as the rear relay man and let the shortstop cover at second. Remember the Jeter flip play? For me, I still like the tandem cut using both middle infielders for the reasons above and especially if I have a left handed first baseman (thrown balls tend to go toward the center of the field).

And yes, the only time I use the first or third baseman is on a relay to the plate with a runner on second. Unless it is a do or die play and the run is meaningful, if the outfielders must move more than 3 steps back, right or left, I want the ball either cut off on its way to the plate or just going straight to second base.

Hope this helps. Let me know what works better for you all. Best of luck! Pat