BEYOND STEALING BASES:
THE BASE STEALING SYSTEM THAT CREATED A NATIONAL LEADER

By Matt Talarico

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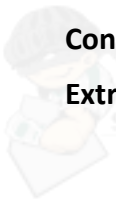
Introduction

Over the last nine years I have had the privilege of coaching college baseball. During this time I have been obsessed with studying the game. In my first two seasons of coaching I began a journey to use this obsession to apply to one of the most untaught areas of baseball, stealing bases.

Base stealing has been more of a recruiting philosophy than a developmental area of the game. You either believe in bringing in fast runners so you can steal or you don't get runners and will go station-to-station. During my coaching time, I eventually tailored my method to reach runners of all speeds. This eventually evolved in the system that produced the NCAA Division I national leader in 2012 and one of the top teams in the country in 2011 and 2014 from a team that has never been previously been known for stealing bases.

The more I research and study pitching tendencies, running technique, speed development, etc. The more I am shocked the topic isn't more researched. As baseball coaches, we spend so much effort in teaching every millisecond of the swing or of the pitchers delivery, but then we just roll players out to first and give them the basics of the leadoff and the secondary. This should be studied more. I really believe base stealers can the odds in their favor if they just buy into being better. It isn't necessarily speed but instincts, which can be developed. This book will attempt to display my journey in teaching athletes and teams (fast and slow) how to steal bases.

I hope there are some tools you can take from my work.

Chapter 1: Background

Every kid looks forward to the opportunity to get to leadoff base. When I was little I remember the 13-year-old season was the big year for a little league player. That fall, one of the local high schools came over and taught our group of 13-year-old kids how to get a leadoff (obviously a big day to get to hang out with the high school kids). These guys taught us how to do all of the "basics" of leading off and stealing bases. That was the last piece of base stealing advice I got as a player until my sophomore year of college. Yes, college.

As a player it was really about trial and error. If something seemed to work I would stick with it. Once, in college I received a few pointers that really helped get a few extra steps or two but the bottom line was that the majority of my base stealing, like for most runners, was based off of the catcher. If the catcher had a cannon for an arm I was probably not testing him. This changed but only after I was done playing.

In my first years of coaching I started playing around with new methods and this became one of my main passions in baseball. The trial and error seemed to be much easier from this perspective and players were evolving quickly. One of the main changes was the attention paid to the catcher.

My second year we started implementing new ideas with generating a bit more momentum than just standard leads. I remember taking our second baseman out and shoveling snow on the new turf football field to do some live reads. This was the start. At this point I realized that anyone could get better jumps and create a threat.

Over my next six years of coaching college baseball everything was built on those days in the Heidelberg gymnasium. I would get to work with so many good players who wanted to maximize their potential and eventually start to rewrite the record books of their school.

Chapter 2: System Overview

The ultimate goal of this base stealing system is to establish pressure on the defense. Pressure is not applied by dialing up the risk factor but by becoming a real threat to steal a base without getting picked off or caught stealing.   It isn't to create a fancy show with flinches and fakes but a systematic approach to address the pitcher's skill set of holding a base runner.

A great base stealer is not a high risk, high reward runner. Any skill set practiced in this system is to create low risk, high reward.

Mental Preparation

Because the tools used in this system are different from traditional base stealing methods it is important to prepare your players for success. This begins with clearly laying out the plan of why and how this will work. Year in and year out I begin with clearly discussing how this has worked with my previous teams and also professional players, which is not easy because they don't break this down on ESPN. Mentally preparing for both success and failure is imperative for success.

Failure is just as important to talk about as past success. If the runner starts out with a few mistakes he needs to realize it takes work to get really good. I often tell my guys if it were easy everyone would be doing it. The fact is that a lot of people want to do the system but they don't handle the ups and downs very well. At the first sign of adversity they want to pull the plug.

As the pre-season or season unfolds you also have to manage the mentality of the team on a game-to-game basis.   When things are going well you have to understand that tomorrow is a different pitcher with a different skill set. When things are not going well you have to be able to adjust without shutting it down or without running your teams out of innings.

Too often coaches believe if they hang a few quotes on the wall it is sufficient to cover the mental game.   The truth is the temperament of the coaching staff and the players in the program is much more important than a sign on the wall. As the coach, you are the most influential person in this system based on how you handle day-to-day success and failure.

- Developing a New Thought Process

This system is going to require a different look at the game. Much like a hitter, you are required to pay attention. The best base stealers are the guys who are consistently looking for tips and advantages.   This is another part of a player's mental development. Once you start looking for a pitcher's tips and trends you start understanding how easy they are to find.   If you have ever been a pitcher that tipped away something then you know exactly what I mean. It is hard to fix habits.

Physical Preparation

Developing a base stealer requires a technical mindset. Overlooking small details can result in fractions of a second lost. We need to be on the winning side of as many close plays as possible. This requires top-level efficiency by great attention to small detail.

When you learn a song on a musical instrument typically you learn a section at a time. Once one section is mastered then you learn another section until you

have mastered all the sections of the song. Put these together and you will play the notes of the song perfectly. There is a final piece of this puzzle however. Perhaps the most important piece is to forget all that you have practiced and just play it.   If you skip this step there tends to be a robotic sound to the music you are playing. Learning to steal bases is a lot like this. As you examine the technique in this book you will need to master all levels in a controlled environment, then move to a game-like environment, and finally take this into a game, forget it, and then play. What will surface is what you have practiced the most and what is truly mastered.

So, it is important to find the best learning environment to accomplish mastery for each individual.   Some players learn well with others around while others need to be secluded. As each individual begins to create habits of the correct technique then stealing bases gets easier.

Chapter 3: First Base Technique

Part 1 – The Old School System

The Old School System is the name I chose to separate the basic leadoff system from the more creative movements we were performing. This is the foundation. If you are thinking of skimming over any of the sections in this book do not let it be this section.

This section is crucial because it is found in every creative leadoff we can imagine. It also allows us to capitalize on the greatest advantage over the opposing pitcher, our ability to measure.

Measuring your leadoffs:
12-foot lead (the Old School Leadoff)
 I like having our guys say their footwork to themselves while taking a lead. We say to ourselves "right, left, shuffle, shuffle." As you can imagine this cannot get everyone to the exact spot we want but through time and repetition they will feel out the stride length they personally need to take to get to the mark we set.
 We should end up around 12' with our left foot. We should be positioned to the back edge of the base marking a straight line to the back edge of second base.
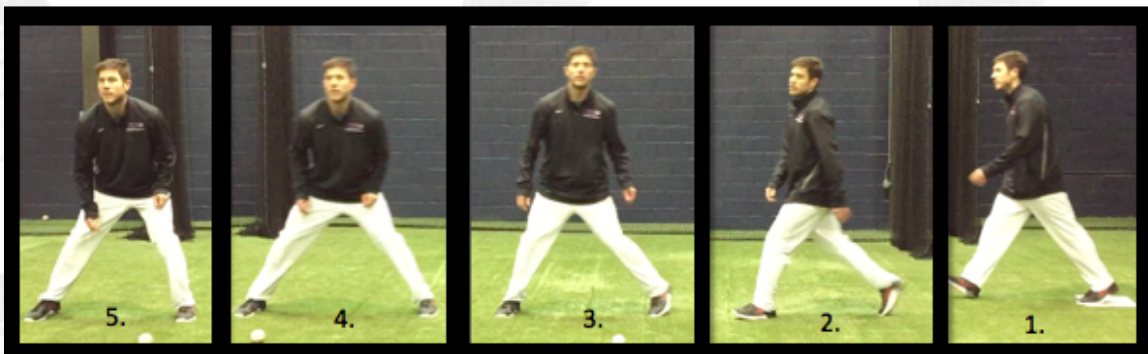
The Old School Return:
 The return footwork should require us to get back to the base as efficiently as possible. Too often a wasted movement will cause us to be slightly late to the bag. If you are interested in being a high level base stealer you have to master being on the winning end of the "bang, bang play."
 From our old school leadoff we will cross over with the right foot and slide back. This is not as simple as it sounds. It can get very technical and I believe video work is the best way for you to develop this habit.
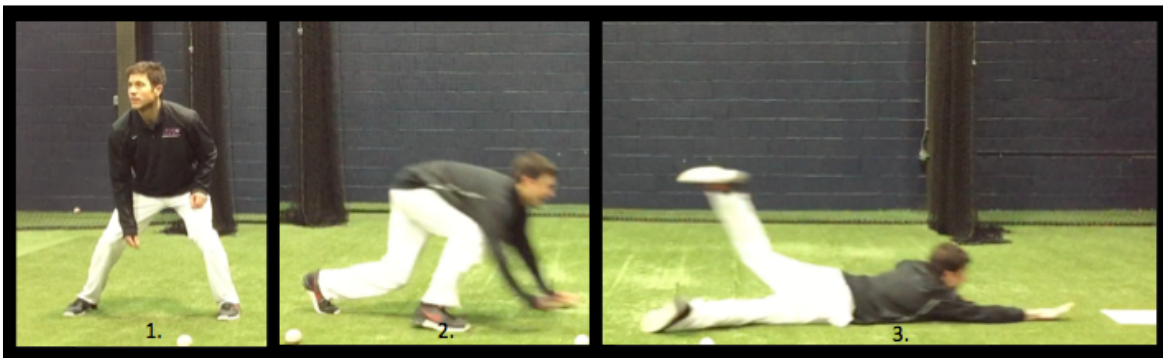
The arm movement and the foot placement really can add fractions of a second to how you return. If my arms flail out it will take a bit more time. I want my runners to imagine they are sliding through a very narrow hallway with their upper body. Think about a defensive lineman using his arm to rip through the offense; he would never do this flailing outside of his body.

Improper footwork can also add to inefficiency. I like having diving competitions. I will have our runners see how far they can dive back to first. Once we have established a maximum distance I will tell them to do an improper dive back to first. It is obvious they are not even close to covering the same ground. You especially see this when a runner does not want to use his right foot and just lunges to dive back to first.

The other foot fault is typically in the placement of the right foot after it crosses over. I often see a big mistake being the front foot crossing too close to the body. This results in a two-part return. The runner seems to look at the bag then change levels and dive. A really good runner, with a small pickoff window, places his right foot in front of the baseline a small amount and slightly plants it on his way back to first. This makes the action more of a one-piece return.

We also want to be sure we slide to the backside of the base. As long as we are sliding we want the first baseman to have to reach to tag the runner. Too often you see runners slide to the front of the base giving the first baseman the advantage on that close play.

Secondary leadoff:

Our secondary leadoff is measured by two shuffles. I am more lenient on the exact measurement of this leadoff because it does not have to be as precise. The key to the secondary leadoff is to have continued momentum through the reading window (or the timeframe we are reading the ball cross the strike zone). It is extremely important to control the pace of your shuffles so we are not planted during this important time, allowing us to make reads on balls hit off of the bat or balls in the dirt.

Maybe the most ignored part of the secondary lead is the return to the base. Too often the runner gets complacent. An intelligent base stealer anticipates back picks. These are inexcusable and are usually the result of a runner with poor habits. After every secondary, after reading a normal pitched and received ball we enforce

the habit of returning hard to first. If we are sliding we should be returning to the back part of the bag forcing the first baseman to make a tag by reaching.

If we are standing, going to easily beat the throw then we are returning to the front portion of the bag with our left foot. It is critical to have a solid base with our body when we plan our feet. Any poor throw from the catcher to the second base side of the bag should result in a collision with the first baseman trying to get around the runner. This should allow the runner to get second and maybe even third off one poor throw. We like to force the catcher to make a great throw if he wants to gamble.

Delayed Steal

The delayed steal is much more about deception than quickness. This is a great option for below average runners. The key is to take your secondary normally, except we want to be slightly more aggressive on the distance gained, but not so much that it is obvious. I like having the runners say "shuffle, shuffle, land, go." This forces the runner to complete the second shuffle, which is usually the signal for the defense that he is running. If his shuffles look normal the runner can often catch the middle infielders and/or the catcher sleeping and take second base.

Heads Down Steal:

This one is not counted as a stolen base but I think it should be. This is advancing an extra 90 feet any time the defense responsible for covering the next base leaves the base vacant. For example, the hitter singles to right field scoring a man from second and takes a hard round around first. The ball is fumbled a bit by the right fielder so he just hits the cutoff man (second baseman) who elects to jog it in to the pitcher. As he is jogging in to talk or lob the ball to the pitcher the shortstop leaves the bag and is looking into the outfield. So at this point the shortstop is walking away from the bag the second baseman is near the pitcher's mound, and the first baseman, who was the cutoff to home is allowing us to keep our round off of the base. This creates an opening at second base. If the intelligent base runner is paying attention and doesn't head back to first too soon, but instead casually increases his lead, he can beat the infielders to second. Plays like this appear often in baseball but will not be capitalized on if players do not anticipate the openings.

Old School Steal:

This tool should be used only if you are mathematically able to be safe at second. We use steal start times to help calculate our odds. If the runner at first runs a 3.4 steal start then we will compare that to the pitcher's time to the plate added with the catcher's pop time (or time to second between innings). A quick pitcher is a low 1.0-1.2 and a big time catcher is 2.0 to second (in game). So if that combination is a 3.1 vs. our 3.4 steal start then we will likely stay put, unless we think he will throw offspeed. If the math is even or in our favor then we will test the defense by stealing.

A successful steal attempt comes from a clean start, and a clean start is largely influenced by the stance. I like the base runner to slightly stagger his lead foot and avoid being squatting too low. This is really an individual preference but we should not be down so low that it hinders our jump. I would say our better steal start times come from a neutral setup.

I also like the rip-through technique with his first step. This is definitely debatable, and honestly I could even go either way on the topic. The other side of the debate talks about drop-stepping the lead foot. I feel like guys just prefer to rip their rear leg across their body in their mind. The main goal for me is to have an efficient runner. If he looks like he stutter steps out of his jump we will adjust how he starts.

I also believe the arms play a pivotal role here. If my arms swing out and around my body I will start slower. I like an emphasis on pulling the lead arm back when starting. When my lead arm pulls back my rear arm will drive across my body tight.

-*Steal start times:* Steal start times are 78' sprints. We don't use a slide and we always start from stealing stance. My high level sprinters are usually in the high 3.2s or low 3.3s, medium level are around 3.4 to 3.5, and low level runners are under 3.5.

Our Old School steals are usually used if we pick up a tip from the pitcher as well. For example, the pitcher leans back before delivery. If we have a tip we will usually just straight steal and try to capitalize on the tip.

Dirt Ball Read:

We touched on this a bit in the secondary section above. For me a dirtball read is during, not after, our secondary where we notice the ball is going to bounce before the catcher. It is extremely difficult for catchers to block, scramble to find the

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ball, pick up the ball, and throw a runner out. Great dirtball read runners could even get this one counted as a stolen base. This happens they are very good reading the ball out of the hand of the pitcher. Runners who are not as good have to wait until the ball reaches the catcher to make a decision.

Some coaches have the philosophy to play this more conservative and force the read to be made after the ball reaches the catcher. I believe this read can be practiced to be made before the catcher, making the runner much more of a threat. It is very difficult for the pitcher to throw a ball low if he knows the runner will advance.

First to third:

Going first to third is definitely not part of stealing a base but we do include it in our arsenal. We want guys to take pride in getting to third on a single.   It might not be a stolen base in the record book but that extra 90' will help us score a run.

Our main focus in being a great first to third team is to be sure our secondary is timed well. If we are at a stop during the time the hitter makes contact it will result in being one step late to third. We also would like to get a bit of a round when hitting second, being sure to lean our shoulder toward home. All of these tips help efficiency which might get us on the winning end of that close call. Great base runners have the mentality of being aggressive to third because they know the importance. Great runners also know what the outfield arms are like and have a pre-pitch plan on how to get that great jump and help the team out.

http://www.stealbases.com/old-school-system/

Part 2 – The New School System

The New School system is a name given to how we begin to gain momentum to make stealing a base easier. There are a few ways of doing this but I prefer the jumping lead.   In my opinion, this is the best method to generate the most momentum without crossing the line of being out of control.

The basic idea is that if I am at a stoplight completely stopped in my car and you pull up in the lane next to me but are still moving when the light turns green you will get the better start.   We try to apply that to getting some movement before pitcher makes his delivery. This helps make slow runners average, average runners fast, and fast runners nearly unstoppable. So, to refer back to the steal start times, some of our 3.2 steal start guys become high 2.9s.

The New School system has helped teams I've coached set new marks in the history books year in and year out. To put it into perspective, 3 of the top 5 career leaders in stolen bases at the University of Dayton are players that used these systems. Of the top 5 single season holders, 4 of them are guys from these same teams, using these same systems.

It is sometimes challenging to get a player to want to move before the pitcher delivers. We have all been taught to wait or we will get picked off. This simply is not true.

Sign Picking

From short leadoffs we open up new options as a base stealer. We are now only a step or two off of the base which allows us to not put all of our attention on the pitcher.   From this area we can capitalize on poor signal stances from the

opposing catcher.   All great catching coaches go through the signal-giving stance but it is up to the catcher to actually implement this on the field. The good catchers will not allow us to have this option, but it is amazing how many catchers will ignore this detail.

Most of the time the catcher will only give a few signals to the pitcher with a man on first alone. His primary concern is changing signs when the runner reaches second because of his clear view to home plate. We can use this to find out when an offspeed pitch is coming or to see if they are calling pickoffs from the catcher. A lot of Division I pitchers will not pickoff if it has not been called in. We can really capitalize on having great jumps on breaking balls or easy returns on called pickoffs, making it frustrating on the pitcher.

What are we looking for?   It is not necessarily important you know the catcher's signal for a curveball or change up. If you can recognize what a fastball is then something different from that would be off speed. For example, if the catcher holds a one finger down (universal fastball sign) and then four fingers down then the next pitch thrown is a fastball you know he is probably giving a pitch type then a location. After checking a couple you could have the signs for the entire series. Pickoffs from the catcher are usually something completely different in his sequence. So if he is giving signs then touches his leg, tugs on his pants, pats his chest, etc., I would be cautious. Knowing pickoffs are coming is great for the mental game of a base stealer.

Shuffle Technique Breakdown

I can speak on this topic for an hour easily. I have spent so much time to help speed up the process to have all of my players understand the feeling of the proper shuffle technique. The New School System is often made or broke from this one shuffle. If mastered, I am convinced it can be easier to return from this position than a standard Old School position.   But it takes a lot of work to reach this level. Although it is difficult to reach this level of mastery it is not required to help your base stealing game.

Stance: For the majority of runners this stance should be a bit more narrow than the Old School stance, which should require the runner to stand up a bit more. My general rule is the closer you are to the base the taller you stand.   A low, squatting stance results in a stiff shuffle that is a bit more bouncy, which increases the pickoff window. The runner should be relaxed and ready to take his shuffle.

Entry: The initial movement of the shuffle should start by the front foot stepping about two inches. If the runner begins with both feet at the same time they will get bouncy.   They can get the appropriate distance and their head can still stay relatively still but it takes longer to land and return.
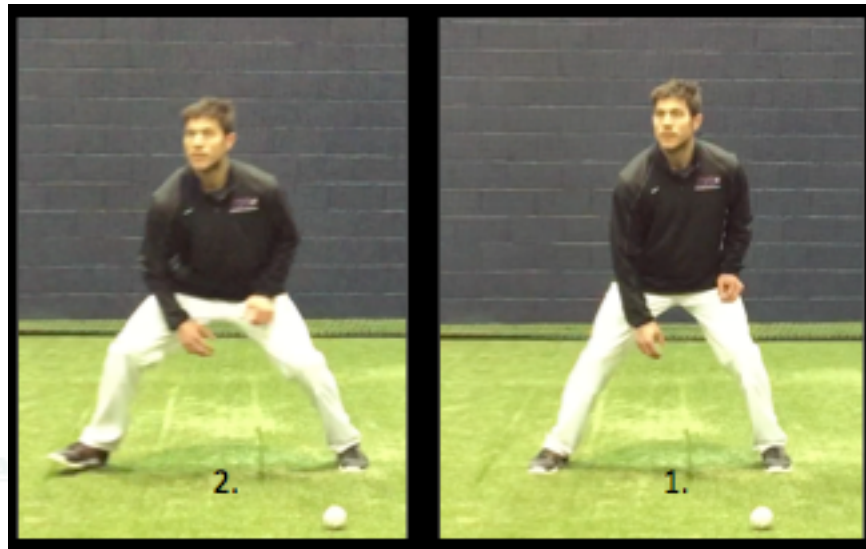
If the front foot goes too far or opens up toward second this will also increase the pickoff window. It forces our body to take a bit longer to get into the air. This would be the same as taking a further shuffle, which would put us in danger. Again, low risk – high reward.

In the air: This can often be a byproduct of the stance and entry, but it is worth explaining what you are looking for. I want a low, controlled shuffle. The big mistake I often run into is in the effort. It is not poor effort but max effort. Players simply try too hard and it results in tension. Tension is our enemy creating delayed responses. It is like watching a clown juggle. You can imagine this clown smiling and talking while throwing objects in the air. He has to stay calm so he can react. The idea is the same here. We need the best reaction time so we can either steal or return.

I think the best way to describe what the runner should look like is to say he could almost carry his cafeteria tray while doing this movement.   His arms are not flailing, his head is not dramatically changing levels, he stays low to the ground, and his feet are quiet in the takeoff and landing.
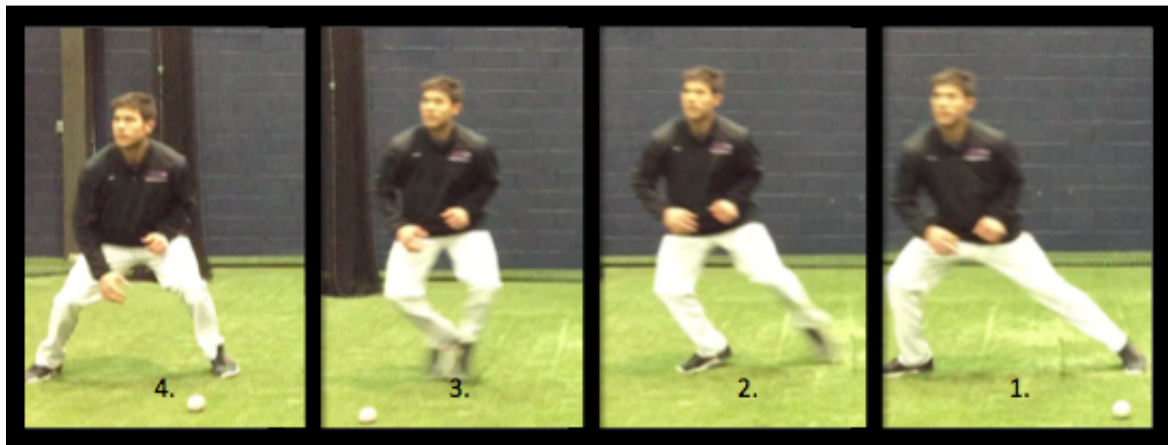
The landing: The runner should be landing in his old school position both in distance and in stance. We are now further from the bag so we should be a bit wider and lower. Too often new base stealers are not centered at this point. They are either too scared to be picked off and leaning toward first base or trying to get the greatest jump ever and leaning toward second. A low risk runner is centered and balanced.

It is also extremely important that they land on their shuffle and stop. It has to be perfect. New runners will often stumble with a couple more shuffles out over the 12' line. They can control this. You just have to be specific and point it out as their coach.

The final part of the landing is to cushion your body into the landing. The best base stealers do not have a definite, hard landing. They land soft and absorb into their legs. This is crucial. If the runner lands too firm, even if all of the technique is correct, it forces him to get a perfect jump. If he absorbs into his legs he can land a bit too early and still keep some of the shuffle momentum, allowing him to still get a decent jump.

The take off: If we are going then we go all out. We always assume we are going to have a play at second unless we are 100% sure. Too often the runner relies on the middle infielders or the sound at home plate to determine the effort. This can be a recipe for failure. Go hard, slide into second, then we assess the situation.

Measuring the New School Leadoff:

In order to gain momentum we have established that we will need some movement. In order to get movement without getting picked off we must decrease the distance of our leadoff. We try to get around 6'. That leaves us with 6' remaining to move around.

To establish this distance we simply walk off the edge of the bag, just like the Old School lead, and say right, left, turn (or pivot to face the plate). For most guys this puts them in the vicinity.

A lot of issues stem from not knowing the distance of the leadoff. For example, the player thinks he's at 6' but he's really at 8'. He shuffles, as he always does, and ends up at 14'. Now we have dramatically increased our vulnerability. The ability to know exactly where you are in the field is everything.

New School Return:

-*Sliding* -After taking a controlled shuffle we are planning on rolling right into our steal start; however, as you can imagine, it does not always go as planned. If the pitcher picks to first at this time we could be in trouble. After our shuffle, or jump, we should be ending with our back foot at 12' putting us right back into the Old School leadoff. As the pitcher picks to first we will simply go right foot cross and return.

Again, we want a small pickoff window. As long as you are taking a leadoff of any kind everyone has a window to be picked. Small, subtle movements will not increase this window. Aggressive, max effort movements will definitely increase this window. It is extremely important to get this technique down to be sure we are still low risk runners. Runners often are caught leaning one way or the other and the shuffle alone caused a pickoff or a caught stealing.

Standing – It is unrealistic to expect your runners to always slide back to first. If we are 6' off the back of the bag and get a good read on a pickoff move our players should know how to come back properly. The footwork I use is right foot replaces the left foot and the left foot goes to the front of the base. The exact same finish as the position when the catcher throws behind we mentioned above in the secondary section.

New School Secondary:

It is important to address the secondary out of the New School System. Before we begin the movement we have to realize where we are at that moment. Unlike the Old School System we may not be in the same spot. For example, the runner is at 6' planning to shuffle but the pitcher quick pitches to the plate before the runner can begin his shuffle. The runner is now just 6' off the base and should try to get two really aggressive shuffles to make up ground. Remember, this is an over aggressive movement and a great time for the catcher to back pick to first base so we have to get back.

If the runner has completed his shuffle and is resting at the 12' mark then the secondary should match the Old School secondary as previously described.

Secondary leadoffs from the New School System are a bit strange to the runners at first. It takes repetition and coaching to reinforce good habits that will come with persistence.

New School Dirt Ball Reads:

Keeping the concept of maintaining momentum, as discussed in the Old School section, it is more important to be moving than to be all the way out at our

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Old School distance to finish a secondary. It would be assumed that a dirtball read could be harder from a New School leadoff considering you could be too close to the bag depending on how you timed the pitcher. This is not the case however. For example, if you are at 6' and the pitcher delivers before you anticipated and are rushing to get your secondary then you are more likely to be moving during the reading window as the ball crosses the plate. This allows the runner to keep his momentum and makes a dirt ball read a bit easier.

If you have taken your shuffle too early and are waiting at 12' then you have to treat it like an Old School secondary and be sure to time up your shuffles so you are not waiting at a standstill during that same window.

New School Steal:

After a clean shuffle, or any action to keep movement to get a good start, we should be out to our old 12' mark. If when we land the pitcher is beginning his delivery we are going to continue to steal second. Can you get thrown out? Yes. But our odds of success are dramatically increased.

We utilize this leadoff only for players who are ready to handle it in a game. This is worked on everyday by all of my players in an effort to get more players ready.

One of the key elements in teaching the New School jump is having the player communicate with the coach on the type of jump. This is a very difficult area to communicate. It can be vague. The player thinks it was a good jump but does not know, the coach thinks it was below average but doesn't want to tell him it was awful. This just leads to miscommunication.

I like to use a 1-5 rating. This helps the player and coach have quick communication and get on the same page. If the player gets a "1 jump" he was probably in an embarrassing out, meaning a run down or obvious out. If the player

had a "5 jump" there was no throw from the catcher because he stole so easily (this does happen). Our goal is to get "3 jumps." This typically means we were still very low risk and stole second safely. The ultimate goal is to be able to ask, "what kind of a jump was that?" and have the player respond with a number. The coach can agree or disagree and practice can move on. When your numbers start to match then you have a runner who understands a good jump.

http://www.stealbases.com/new-school-system/

Situational baseball:

This is what we call areas of the game where the head coach needs to make a baseball decision. Does the team bunt, steal, hit and run, etc.? Any situation like this requires a sign to put on a play. This sign also takes away the freedom of running. As a base runner we will typically enter the Old School System and perform a task for the team. This includes a straight steal. If we are giving a steal sign for that specific pitch, we are telling him to go Old School and run. It is unrealistic to think the player is going to just time up a great jump and run. We have also trained the player to shut it down when he does not feel the right momentum. The coach cannot simply force him to go with bad momentum. It just isn't that easy.

The other situational position is the trail runner with a man on second. If there is a guy on the base in front of us then the number one responsibility is to get good secondary leadoffs and to not get back picked from the first baseman crashing or from the catcher throwing behind to first after the pitch. If the first baseman allows us, and he usually does, we will increase the distance on our Old School leadoff and open up our feet. This allows us to see the first baseman, out of the corner of our eye, and the runner at second.

If the runner at second starts to steal third we should be able to steal second behind him. The issue of getting thrown out at second on the double steal usually comes from a poor reaction from the first base runner or him pulling up early assuming he will throw the ball to third. As mentioned before, once we take off we always assume we will have a play at the next base.

Chapter 4: Second Base

Old School System:

The basic system from second base has a broad range of rules. Our lead is dependent on where the middle infielders decide to play us. The key is to be able to be one step faster than the defense to second.

Second base is very different from first base because our stance is extremely casual. We want to look as non-threatening as possible. Too often we tip the pitcher we are trying to run with our body language alone. A lot of times we can gradually increase our distance without anyone realizing we have done it.

Much like our Old School lead from first, we are going on the pitcher's delivery home. We typically will use this tool if we feel like they are completely ignoring us at second but that doesn't happen often. Honestly, our Old School System at second is more of terminology than anything. So they are in the Old School System to just set up a New School steal attempt in a few pitches.

New School System:

There are a lot of similarities in the New School work at second and the New School work at first. The idea is still the same but we have much more room for error at second base.

Our initial lead, again measuring with the back foot, will be about 12'-15' and we will end up as far as our footwork will allow us. This area depends on how good your footwork is but hopefully we can get quite a bit off the base as the pitcher lifts his leg and take third base. Once the runner understands his footwork and the distance he specifically needs to reach third base it is easy to steal.

Shuffle breakdown

Stance – Our stance must be casual and non-threatening. You have to find out what works for you but most baseball players are not good actors. They still look very tense to the pitcher, which makes it very difficult to divert attention.

Entry – We take an exaggerated shuffle that allows us to cross our feet. This begins with the same entry as the New School shuffle at first base. Our right foot starts the process.

In the air – Because there are not defenders directly on the bag at second we can be much more aggressive on our shuffle technique even allowing us to cross our feet in the air. This is really the option to our runners to use a cross over or a very aggressive shuffle but they must cover ground. I like the crossover because a lot of runners force the shuffle and do not cover the same ground using twice the effort.

The landing – If the pitcher delivers as you are nearly landing your aggressive shuffle you should have third base easily. If he does not deliver and holds the ball or gives another look to second then the runner must stop. At second base you do not necessarily have to land and stop completely. We are allowed to have a stumble but you cannot hang out in "no man's land." You have to retrace your footwork back.

The inside move – The big question is always "well what if the pitcher inside moves?" This is a valid question but if the shuffle is done correctly, much like first base, he should be squared to the plate while reading this move allowing the runner to race back to the base. We will not do our shuffle with someone standing near the base so inside moves should not be an option.

Pitcher trends:

        Although this is true at first base I would say it is more relevant at second base. We are really able to take third because of the pitcher's basic trends. We often are advancing because of how he looks at second. There are a few basic types I've encountered in the last 9 years.

1. The basic look at second, look to home to focus on the target, and deliver to home. Maybe mixing his looks up a couple of times but the same pitcher.
2. The pitcher that looks at the runner, looks away to home, does not really pick up the target and delivers.
3. The pitcher that looks at second and delivers to home without looking away until mid delivery.

        We can handle all of these options. The first is basic and easy to capitalize on. We simply pick a number of looks and begin to move into our footwork as he turns to home. The second pitcher is a bit tougher but still manageable. We have to begin our footwork immediately as he's looking away on the number of looks we anticipated. The final pitcher is tough. We are still going to be active on him but we will not force the issue. We have to be comfortable starting our footwork on the anticipated look while he is looking at us. If you keep trying on this guy you will get picked off so use your attempts sparingly. We hope that his focus at second will cause a lack of command at home. We will take that trade.

Coach Communication:

        It is so important to get on the same page as the runner. We use simple words that are quick and we try to keep it as silent as possible. Too often the runner is thinking about making a break for third and the coach starts yelling "Add!" or "You're Good!" and then draws attention to the runner. If you have ever been a base stealer you know this does not help the situation.

        Our simple rule is that you cannot add or do your footwork with a fielder in pickoff range. So if we yell our word to say the defender is in the zone the runner knows to hold. If the defender leaves the area we will yell the other word saying you are good to get your footwork. The best defensive teams are on the same page as the pitcher, making our window to communicate small. Poor teams leave pick range too early allowing the runner to get his rolling start.

We also have to be sure never to return too close to the bag until the ball is coming to second. This is one of the key errors I see with base runners, this or simply taking your eye off of the person with the ball.

The Hybrid System:

This system is what we have to do to defend the defense against the New School leadoffs. As you can imagine, over time (a few weeks into our first year) people quickly try to adjust to what our runners are trying to do. It is not a secret and we do not try to make it a secret. We have to be consistent at mixing our leadoffs or understanding our Hybrid options.

These can be preformed from first and second base and are just simple adjustments or fakes within our guidelines. For example, my decoy should never take me outside of the 12' mark at first base.

*Here are the typical defense options I have seen in Division I baseball:
1.) Pitcher begins peeking
2.) Frequent pickoff attempts
3.) Timed pickoffs
4.) Called picks from a position player (Yes, this happened in a real game. I have seen it all)

We need to have options for teams defending our base stealing. An aggressive base stealing team does not shut it down; it modifies its game plan. We will typically recognize their plan and adjust accordingly. I will address each tactic starting from the bottom up.
4.) Called picks from a position player happen when the first baseman or the third baseman attempts to tip the pitcher on when to pick to first. I have not seen this very often simply because the timing is too tough to relay. It has happened and we really stuck to our game plan, maybe mixing in a fake or two to keep unnecessary throws going to first.
3.) Timed pickoffs – We see this one all the time. These are rehearsed plays called from the catcher or the dugout. It encourages the pitcher to keep his eyes on the catcher who will signal him when to pickoff. This is a respectable option but easily defendable. If we know this is going on it is usually because we can tell the pitcher is not straining to look over but having well-timed pickoffs. This changes our focus to the catcher to see if he will tip when they are coming over. If we mix up our leads it still takes a lot to go right for the defense to get a pickoff.
2.) Frequent pickoff attempts – This is a valid defense but takes a pitcher who is comfortable going to first. I like to approach this pitcher by setting up some very short leads leading to easy returns. Think of it as a video game where two guys are fighting. Every time one gets a close play at first or a pickoff his power goes up. Every time you get back easily without a slide his power goes down. Eventually the attempts will wear off.
1.) Pitcher peeking – At first base pitchers often adjust to see the runner a bit better. If the pitcher is athletic it may require us to adjust. This pitcher's plan is either to pick off or wait until our feet completely stop and pitch. The first thing we have to determine is the level of detail he can really see. If he can only see a blurry image of the runner then subtle fakes are all that are needed. This could be a fake shuffle gaining little to no ground. We will then take our real shuffle and go. As

long as we are mixing our leadoffs it should make the guessing game too difficult for the pitcher.

If the pitcher can really see well we will know because the subtle fakes are not getting pickoffs. We will then have to go to actually gaining some ground on the fake. For example, if we start at 6' we might shuffle to 8' then again to 12' to get our jump. Remember our biggest advantage is the ability to measure. The pitcher will never see well enough to realize you are not at your 12' mark.

It is important to note that we will concede before forcing a stolen base. We have to believe that a pitcher manipulating his mechanics and constantly picking off will eventually get beat by the hitter. We cannot keep forcing the stolen base because we will lose that battle eventually.

The Hybrid System is determined by the pitcher on the mound at that moment. What skill set does he have and how can we adjust without increasing much risk. If you can get players to understand it they will see it is not that big of an adjustment. The Old School System is still the foundation to everything going on.

Sliding Technique

Sliding is easy work to mix into the drills you already do at practice but it does need to be coached. Too often a player loses the close play from an inappropriate slide. The correct slide should have an exact purpose.

1.) Slide straight into the base – We perform head-first slides everywhere except home for the most part. The most basic slide is through the bag. Because we are lined up from our stance to run to the back edge of the base then that will be our target with our inside hand. If we have the right momentum we will go directly through the bag hooking it with our inside foot. This is a very easy slide but guys need to feel it.

2.) Headfirst grabbing slide – When the defensive player is blocking the bag in any way we will then look to grab a corner and hang on. If we attempt the "straight into the base" slide we are likely to come off the bag if a defender is in the way.

3.) Wide slides – This is the slide I see misused the most often. If a runner is sliding wide then it is only to avoid a tag. Runners will use this unnecessarily and allow the infielder another split second to catch and tag. Again, this is to be used if you realize the defender is catching the ball and you are slightly beat.

4.) Feet first slide – We typically use this technique if we are certain we have the bag. We try to slide a bit late and pop up to look for a throwing error.

5.) Headfirst swim slide – this slide is for an emergency. The ball has clearly beaten the runner to the bag. The runner will start his slide and roll up on one side of his body (the opposite of the defender) making himself as thin as possible with the hopes of dodging a tag. You would be amazed at how much this works. It is called a swim slide because the runner looks like he is swimming over the tag.

6.) Feet first pop up slide – this is another emergency slide for when the ball has really beaten the runner.   This will be a very early pop up slide with the plan to pop up about 2' before reaching the bag. We are hoping to catch the defender off guard. As the runner pops up before the bag the defender will reach to tag out of instinct. The runner should then dodge and try to reach the bag. This also can work with practice.

4 tips once you have started:

All right, you are running and there is no turning back. Runners often make a few simple mistakes. 1.) Arm movement – your arms should be creating 90 degree levers when they travel behind your body vs. cutting across your chest. From a blimp view you make yourself run in zigzags. We want to eliminate this as much as possible. 2.) Run in a straight line – This one kills me. I see it often in the coach's box. First off, the runner is behind the baseline, making it a slightly further distance. Second, when he accelerates he adjusts mid way to the inside or the outside of the bag. As a runner we need to pick up a focal point to run to. This helps avoid any wasted movement. 3.) Positive thoughts – I really believe fear slows some runners down. If you want to test it I would encourage you to try it. If you have ever been terrified while running from a dog or your big brother you know what I am talking about. This happens to base runners. They run a decent 60 yard dash but are just baseball slow. When you take off you need to think about being extremely fast. 4.) Use the appropriate slide – This is another one that really bothers me. The defender tells you what slide to use. Never hook slide just because you felt like it. As you get to higher levels of baseball defenders will use decoys to pretend the ball isn't coming and then slap a tag on you before you knew what hit you.

Mental keys for the New School System:

The runner must be comfortable. The only way to get comfortable is to put in the repetition every day. Often, my base runners feel better about the situation than I do. We won a conference title by 1 game. Late in that final game we needed a run and were going to bunt. The player looked at me and said he was comfortable. I signaled to remove the bunt and we stole. That player scored on a single because he

believed without doubt, without any false confidence, he was better than that specific pitcher. I have to believe that just came from repetition.

http://www.stealbases.com/second-base/

Chapter 5: Building a game plan

Now that we have an established set of tools it is important to know how to use them.

My second year at Dayton we had a player who was a great vocal leader. He was a big hitter who was an every day middle of the lineup guy. It was the first game of the year and I was going over the offensive game plan to hit off of the opposing pitcher and, as I always do, I asked the hitters if anyone had anything to add. I will always remember his statement. He said "make sure you guys aren't out there shuffling for no reason and blowing it for everyone else."

I was amused by a couple of things; first, he was thinking of base stealing when his main role was definitely at the plate, and second, how accurate he was in predicting what was probably going to happen that early in the season.

Having a game plan on the bases is much like having an approach at the plate. You can have the best swing on the planet but very few hitters can get away with going up there hacking away. The majority of good base stealers get out there with a plan of attack against that specific pitcher.

This plan is determined by asking a simple question: "How much respect do we need to show this specific pitcher?"

Respect is earned a few different ways. Mainly if the pitcher is quick to the plate, has quick feet to first base, is very comfortable changing looks to first, or has a plus pickoff move then we will have to respect him holding the running game. For these pitchers we will modify to a bit of a conservative style until we feel like we can dial it up. If the pitcher is demanding an elite level of respect we would rather shut it down vs. getting picked off or thrown out. These guys are extremely rare.

The majority of Division I pitchers fall somewhere in the middle. Every once in awhile you will get a pitcher without the skill set to pick you off but typically you have to have a bit of a plan.

Basic game plan templates:
High respect:

Part 1: Establish that we are not going to get picked off by getting some easy returns to first. This may come from sacrificing our leadoff or even anchoring down at first to get late reads. The goal is to get this pitcher to start giving up because every pickoff is an easy return.

Part 2: Get a steal. Now that the pitcher is beginning to ignore the runners a steal is important. This can be a bit demoralizing because these "high level" respect pitchers are not used to people running on them.

Part 3: Start to build off of that momentum and eventually knock him out of the game. You are probably only stealing with your elite runners.

*This is the perfect scenario. These guys are not easy to deal with in reality. The majority of the time we are just trying to get him to notice us and adjust his game plan. If we steal zero bases but get a little focus off of the hitter then it is a big win against a "high respect" pitcher.

Medium respect:

Part 1: Mix up your leads at first. Try and get some easy returns and look to steal with the elite runners. Use the medium runners to shuffle from time to time

but with no intention of stealing. The low level runner's only role is to not get picked.

Part 2: After a few steals start to get the medium level runners involved.

Low respect:

Part 1: Look for every opportunity to run. We talk about sniffing this guys ability out like sharks smelling blood. A "low respect" pitcher can still be a really good arm but may have long levers and slow feet to first. Just because he throws hard to the plate does not necessarily mean his pickoff is electric.

Opposing pitcher evaluation:

An often-overlooked aspect of baseball is the attention to detail when the opposing pitcher is preparing. We typically do not have the luxury of game film. We do get scouting reports but we are simply hoping those are somewhat accurate. It is of huge benefit to simply pay attention to the pitcher and catcher as they start to get loose.   Here is the typical pre-game plan on a Friday night game (this can be modified to whatever your league does):

Home team BP 3:50-4:30
Visitor team BP 4:30-5:10
Field cleanup 5:10-5:15
Home infield/outfield 5:15-5:25
Visitor infield/outfield 5:25-5:35
Field rep 5:35-5:50
Umpires meeting 5:53
Home team takes the field 5:55
National anthem 5:57
Game 6:00

There is a lot of downtime in this sequence. I don't think it is realistic to have everyone obsessing over stealing bases throughout this time for the same reason we don't think about hitting or pitching until it is time to lock in. Sometime right around infield outfield if you look across the field a guy, clearly on a different schedule than the rest of the team, will begin to slowly get ready. He goes by his own pace and does his own drills.   Eventually he grabs a partner (usually a catcher) and starts to toss. This player we are talking about is the guy who is probably pitching. Even without a scouting report you can generally pick him out.

This means it is time to lock in. We want to see how his arm works or how athletic he is before he even steps on the bullpen mound. When he does get on that bullpen mound we want to see what he looks like out of the stretch. This is his comfort area. This is the timing and rhythm he will go to more often than anything else. It is important to know that.   This alone can begin to tip us on the type of game plan we will need to be successful from the very beginning.

As the game begins we will continue to take note of his actions. The catcher will give us a free view of his arm strength between innings, if we are watching we can begin to start estimating steal start times. The catcher popped 2.0 between innings and the pitcher was a consistent 1.4. All guys who are in the ballpark of a 3.4 steal start need begin to understand their role off of that guy.

All of this can be examined before the most important part of the evaluation for base stealers, when the first runner reaches first.   Pay attention to the pitcher. We often get great tips before the pitcher even knows people are watching.

Chapter 6: Creating a base stealer

Now we are aware of all of our options and ability to apply this in a game, but how do you start creating this in yourself or one of your players. I believe this order is incredibly important.

1. Teach the player why it works – kids are smart. I believe the Internet has made them question everything. I don't necessarily believe this to be a bad thing but you have to do some convincing and use it as a tool. I would do all I could to convince the player he or the team is perfect for this system then begin to build the arsenal.
2. Teach them how to return - I think the first three practices should be spent on all the returns. I would then slowly integrate drills until the return is a natural reaction. Confidence in getting back whenever the pitcher picks off is the best starting point to build an elite runner.
3. Teach them the feeling of a good jump - The runner has to really understand the FEEL of a good jump. This can only be accomplished with repetition and video. Once they understand the jump they will no longer force poor momentum.
4. Understand the situation – What are the trends of the team you are playing? What is the pitcher throwing for a strike? What hitters in the lineup have hit fastballs hard (they will probably get something soft in the next at bat)? What does this team do with 0-2 (a lot of teams expand with a fastball, not a good running pitch)?
5. Know your role on the team – It is reasonable to expect everyone to have a stealing role on the team but unrealistic to think the slowest guys are going to lead the country. The slow guys need to take pride in setting up the fast guys. The fast guys need to take pride in stealing a ton of bases. It is a team system.
    a. Slow runners' number one job is to not get picked off or have the pitcher have a close play on them. All easy returns all the time. When the pitcher starts to sleep then he can get a jump. A great slow base stealer ends the year 6-6.
    b. Medium runners have to be able to fluctuate back and forth. They have to play the setup guy and the base stealer. These guys have difficult roles but can definitely get 15-20 bags in a good year. That is a great year on most teams (probably the team leader).
    c. Fast guys should feel like they are running a lot. They need to take pride in running and should look to capitalize as often as possible without being reckless.

Chapter 7: Drills

The purpose of any drill is ultimately to create a feel. In my coaching experience I have tried quite a few drills to replicate our base stealing systems but I only keep the drills that seem to create a real feeling that will be experienced during a game.

Daily walk drills (first base only):
Individual drill
Purpose: Develop an understanding of where you are on the field.
Tools needed: A base and cones, baseballs or really anything to mark your distance.
How to do it: Begin by marking 12' from the base with a cone then by marking 6' with another cone. Starting at the edge of the base go through an Old School lead off with your eyes closed. When you get to the 12' mark look down to see if your left foot is in line with the cone. The runner then walks back to the starting point and does the same thing with a New School lead, then a New School lead with a shuffle, then ends with a New School jump.
Goal: End with an understanding of your own stride length and how to get to your distance with little or no thought.

Dry drills (first or second base):
Individual or a team drill
Difficulty: Easy
Purpose: to work on technique without having the worry of pickoffs.
Tools needed: a base and video recorder if you do not have a coach
How to do it: Simply walk out your New School leadoff and go through a shuffle and jump. The coach, or video breakdown, should be very detailed in an attempt to get everything perfect.   Be sure to include returns in this drill. The entire drill should be up to the base runner and what he wants to imagine.
Goal: Have a great understanding of how a controlled shuffle, return, and jump are performed. It is important the majority of the coaching occurs during this drill vs. trying to work this out in a live game.
Variation: Difficulty - Moderate
The runner tries to get a New School jump on every rep and his coach yells back randomly, forcing the runner to react and return.

Ladder drills (first base only):
Individual or a team drill
Difficulty: Moderate
Purpose: to work on a controlled shuffle and simulate the panic feeling when a pitcher picks off to first.
Tools needed: a base, baseballs, and a coach or partner.
Hot to do it: Mark at least four balls (up to six) every six feet from first. The runner will get a New School leadoff from the base and begin his shuffle every six feet. If he makes it all the way to the last ball he will take off like he is getting a New School jump. If the coach or partner yells "back" at any point the runner will return 12' back (or two baseballs).

Goal: The base runner should have a much more balanced shuffle from having to repeat it and potentially return on every repetition. He should also experience that feeling of panic and learn to use good habits to return.

Variation: Difficulty – Hard

The coach stands behind the runner and intentionally yells back at vulnerable positions.

Stop Sign Drills (first or second base):

Individual drill

Difficulty: Hard

Purpose: force the base runner to make decisions in a more difficult environment than he will during a game.

Tools needed: a base, a coach, and two signs (can be fancy or a simple).

How to do it: The runner gets a New School leadoff with the coach standing out toward the pitcher's mound. As the runner shuffles and lands the coach will hold up a sign saying "stop" or "go." If the runner sees "stop" he must return, if "go" then he will continue to steal. It is important to wait to flash the sign until the base stealer is in the window to read the pitcher. So performing this drill at second should be at the point of the inside move from the pitcher vs. the quick pick.

Goal: The in game read should seem much easier after mastering this drill.

Variation: Difficulty – Master

The coach mixes the colors written on the cards or even changes the language. If the player sees red "go" it really takes some thinking. If he is forced to translate a word he has never seen it becomes extremely difficult.

Live reads (first or second base):

Individual or a team drill

Difficulty: Depends on the coach (Easy to Hard)

Purpose: to simulate what they will see in a game.

Tools needed: a base and a coach

How to perform: A coach gets on the mound with a glove simulating a pitcher. The runner simply tries to get jumps off of the pitcher.

Goal: To continue to improve in game reactions.

Variation: Difficulty – Easy

The coach can slightly peak at the runner to give him good jumps to gradually build confidence. You can also add cones to the 6' and 12' mark so the player can see his distances if he is still a beginner.

Partner races (first or second base):

Team drill

Difficulty: Moderate to Master

Purpose: to create a competitive race while learning how important momentum is.

Tools needed: a coach and a partner

How to perform: the two runners will get their leadoffs from the starting line. The front runner will get an Old School lead while the back runner gets a New School lead. When the back runner shuffles the coach will say go at his own judgment. If the coach says nothing the two runners will stay put at 12' until the coach says go. Once the coach says go it is a race until the determined finish line.

Goal: To give the runners a mixture of New and Old school jumps and create a competitive race they are trying to win. If they are trying to actually win you are more likely to catch them leaning.

Variation: Master

The coach can mix in a "back" call as an option. He can also simulate a pitcher instead of saying words.

Team races

Team drill (great for big groups)

Difficulty: Hard

Purpose: To get the team to compete and make realistic reads.

Tools: a coach

How to perform: 6-10 players on the team line 6' from the starting line. The coach will simulate a pitcher. If a player is picked off he is eliminated and if a player wins the sprint he stays in. The winners advance to the next round and the losers sit and watch until the next event. Eventually it will be a one on one race with everyone watching and cheering.

Goal: Create a competitive environment where the runner is forced to rely on his instincts.

4 Way Stations

Team drill

Difficulty: Easy to difficult

Purpose: Live in game response during practice.   It also allows pitchers to work on their moves.

Tools: 4 bases

How to perform: Divide your team into 4 groups, one at each base (home included). Have 4 pitchers on the mound treating each base as first or second bases (this is pre-determined and they will all choose either first or second) and four first baseman covering the bases. The runners will work on getting jumps and returns off of a pitcher really trying to pick him off.

Goal: Get a real reaction to a thrown pickoff. I like this for returns considering it will be very difficult to get a jump off of a pitcher who does not have to worry about a hitter.

Dirt Ball Reads

Team drill or individual

Difficulty: Easy to medium

Purpose: Prepare base runners to read the pitch on the way to the plate.

Tools: Pitching machine (preferred) or a coach to throw as realistic as possible.

How to perform: Make 2-5 lines at first base and/or second base. Have the first runner's view blocked by an object covering the catcher, we use a portable mound propped on its side. The coach will pitch a ball to the catcher as the runners at first and second get their secondary leadoff. The coach will mix good pitches and pitches in the dirt. The runners at first are trying to see the ball in the dirt by the angle of the pitch thrown, while the runners at second are watching to see if the ball bounces away from the catcher.

Goal: Get a game-like reaction from the base runner. If done right, the player will develop great game instincts on the ball in the dirt.

Sliding Variations
Individual or team
Difficulty: Easy
Purpose: to work on all slide types
Tools: a base and a coach
How to perform: I like using all of the base paths or you could modify it for a gymnasium. A coach starts at the bag with a glove ready to simulate a tag. The runners will run into the base and work on the necessary slide described above.
Goal: To build the instincts of a correct slide for different situations.
Variations: Easy
Mix the same slides in on practice this is actually the best way to build real instincts.

http://www.stealbases.com/curriculum/drills/

Chapter 8: Typical problems

Frequently asked questions
-What about left handed pitchers at first?
I get this question all the time and I understand why. Left-handed pitchers are actually easier than righties assuming they don't have a great move to first (most lefties don't). We approach lefties a few different ways.

1. We will run on his first move if he is not a read guy (meaning he lifts his leg and waits to make a decision to pitch or pick until his leg is all the way at the top) and he has fallen into a trend.
2. In a New School lead we will delay our decision window. The base stealer's decision window has to be made at the peak of the leg lift for that specific pitcher. Too often the runner tries to read his New School jump immediately as his foot comes off the ground (like a righty) and it is a complete gamble. This is the trick to run New School off of a lefty.
3. If he is one of the few with a good move we will anchor down at first. This means we shorten our Old School leads a bit and delay our secondary until the pitcher releases the ball to the plate.

-When do we tell the runner to start his shuffle?
This question is much like telling a hitter when to start his stride. It is not so easy we can just say, "if you start here it will work." It is really a feel that is created over time. We like to eliminate all counting or guessing and just start getting in rhythm with the pitcher.

-What if the pitcher gives zero looks at second base?
This one can be tricky at first but this can also be a trend. If the pitcher is doing it in a pattern the runner can adjust to it.

-When you measure steal starts, why don't you slide to find a more accurate time?
Maybe we should but the honest answer is consistency. I have kept records for so long I think it gets the job done.

Rushing the process:
If I did not get the point across before then I will do it here. Our athletes can be delicate. If you start them off with high-level mastery drills it can be difficult to get them out of it. I have definitely had guys who I should have taken more time to do individual work or kept them out of difficult drills that hindered their development.

It is a good idea to start with easy drills and also end with easy drills, sandwiching the challenging drills in the middle. This will allow them to end on a good note.

Micromanagement:

If you are interested in this system and extremely controlling it can be very tough. One problem I often see is that coaches try to have this liberal way of running the bases but are extremely conservative when they want the runner to make decisions. The coach spends time drilling and then wants to give steal signs every time the runner is in a stealing situation. This is too difficult to achieve. You have to have feel and rhythm developed by practice. This is no longer a switch with the ability to turn on and off. The runner knows it was a bad jump and the body is trained to not go but the coach gave the steal sign. What you will get is a forced New School jump that will likely end up in an out by four steps.

Players need to work and develop the ability to understand good times to run. It is much like teaching a catcher to call a game. It can be taught and developed through a bit of time. This allows the team to generate comfort in its attempts to go or not to go. If at any point during the season a player is not comfortable with one type of a lead or another it will never be forced.

The coach also has to realize when it is or is not permitted to have a reaction to an out. This must be a free feeling. If you react to an out by yelling or poor body language the player is only going to tighten up.

Our rules for getting mad (and the runners know this):
1.) Getting out past 12'
2.) Hanging out in "no-man's land" after a secondary
3.) Trying to force a stolen base just because they have not got a jump in awhile
4.) Getting back picked from the catcher
5.) If the trail runner gets thrown out a double steal
6.) Getting back picked as the trail runner
7.) A hitter hits an ahead in the count pitch on a great jump

Situations to NOT get mad:
1.) ANY situation when you first start this system
2.) New School lead pickoff that is perfectly timed
3.) Getting thrown out stealing second or third with good momentum
4.) Foot work is not perfect on a standing return
5.) Running with a slightly poor jump
6.) Not getting a steal attempt, but clearly working
7.) Any out that was embarrassing

If you have ever been picked off in a game then you know how embarrassing it is. If you have ever been thrown out trying to steal it is also embarrassing. The only thing more embarrassing in baseball is a big strike out or a dropped fly ball. In an environment where we are trying to get guys to steal at a high rate you cannot get on them for not having the result you wanted. This, like all of baseball, requires a commitment and focus on the process of getting it right.

-How to deal with micromanagement

If you have to micromanage, or maybe work for a person who is of this nature, I do think you can still utilize the same tools but it does require negotiation. Maybe allow just one or two guys the freedom to test the waters while the rest of the team sticks to the Old School system. For those couple of guys the rules must apply. Let them learn and they will grow to steal bases for the program. Again, the goal is not necessarily to steal a ton of bases as a team but to apply pressure.

Inability to reach base

As you might imagine, this can be a problem in the base-stealing plan. Obviously, this is not referring to never getting on base but to a team that struggles in all around offense. This issue becomes that when runners do reach base they feel like they are the only shot at scoring and the team gets very conservative. It is also for the pitcher to pay attention to the runner because the lack of scary bats in the lineup. The best way to solve this problem is checking your team's offensive identity. It is probably best to find ways on base as the top priority and then stealing bases will catch up down the road when the team is more comfortable. These teams may need to change gears to a plate discipline team who can drive up pitch counts vs. a team who hits doubles.

Leaving out details

It is easy to just write rules down on a piece of paper or have a meeting where you explain how to get a leadoff, slide, return, etc. But the most challenging part is actually applying these skills so they are a real-time reaction. This takes a coach constantly watching and evaluating. Players will definitely overlook details. First, they have never been taught to actually pay attention to this aspect of the game and second, they will get so excited about the feeling of a great jump they will just want to focus on that. You have to really be meticulous about details to create a base stealer but also know when it is time to just watch and let them play.

Falling into trends

This is another common flaw I don't believe we will ever fully overcome. It takes experience to really understand this and college players are typically around for three to five years and gone. It is something we try to accomplish through communication but it is not easy to fully achieve. What does it mean to fall into trends? If a runner falls into simple patterns he becomes just as predictable as the pitcher. It is really the direct opposite.

When watching a pitcher for trends you can pick up subtle things to help give you an advantage, but if he is a good athlete he can do the same to us if we allow it. If a runner gets to first and does a New School leadoff, doesn't get his rhythm so he doesn't go, then repeats the process for a few more pitches then he is asking for trouble. A good base stealer can invest pitches for later. He is looking for trends but is not guessing each pitch.

Often when "creating a base stealer" this will happen early in the process. At first, the pitcher is caught off guard and the runner gets a free stolen base. If the next time the runner does the same thing then the pitcher will probably adjust. Just be smart and learn to invest pitches.

http://www.stealbases.com/faults/

Conclusion

This system can work for you.   Even if not in the way I have used it in the past there will be at least some benefit to your team or you personally as long as you invest the time. Base stealing has long been an art you were either born with or you were not.   Hopefully this can show you some of the tools to help create instincts of players who do not normally feel "natural" on the bases.

Many coaches have set out to try this and I believe few stick with it. The coaches who invest the time get great results.   All levels can use this despite facilities or a large number of coaches to help. Creativity because of adversity due to not having the "perks" of a big program will actually get you better at understanding the system. You can do this.

This project has been my mission to change how offensive players look at baseball. It isn't only about hitting to be productive but also about finding ways to capitalize on moving up 90 more feet.   This system is an effort to develop feel and focus more attention on ignored aspects of the game. Instead of having dugout conversations about what pitches the pitcher is locating we make an effort to also discuss how they plan on holding runners once we are on base. I believe you will find most teams have ignored or skimmed over this aspect. Once you know what to look for you quickly turn singles into doubles and doubles into triples with very limited risk.

Take your time, get the details right, then forget it and play. LEARN THE MUSIC!
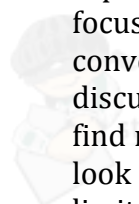
Extras:

Speed Development:

      The key issue that is often ignored with speed development in young baseball players is the fact that you generally must run MORE to get faster. Too often a young player will understand he needs to get faster to play at a higher level but simply will not work as often on his speed as he does on his hitting or throwing.

      Sprint technique is critical but it also important to develop quickness to be able to move side to side. This applies for defensive range but also when using techniques to gain momentum. It seems like each year that passes there are less multisport athletes. So we are teaching a shuffle that is controlled but the player may have never had to shuffle past a few agility warm-ups before lifting weights as opposed to a player who has played basketball in high school and is familiar with the movement.
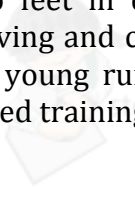
For speed development we try to utilize a few things:
1. Strength training – You do get faster in the weight room.
    a. Lower body - Squats, heavy step-ups, front squats, etc.
        i. Lifting legs obviously produces stronger legs but all lifts are not created equal. The pressure put on a player's body to perform a squat (or body squat for youth players) forces the player to brace the weight. This is not only training your leg muscles but your central nervous system. This bracing is remembered when your body has to do athletic movements, like sprinting. Athletes know this feeling because they only happen in the lifts most people don't want to do.
            1. Machines generally do not create this same feeling because the weight runs along track. This creates a false strength that could lead to a weaker core and injury.
    b. Upper Body – Sprinters are built like superheroes not like cross-country runners.
        i. Shoulders, neck, chest, upper back, lower back, and abdominals should all be worked to promote a strong core, which allows us to keep better running form when fatigued which also prevents injury from technique breakdown.
2. Agility training
    a. We utilize ladders, jump rope, line jumps, high, explosive box jumps, etc. to produce foot quickness.
        i. The jump rope is perhaps one of the must under utilized pieces of foot quickness for base stealers. Watch a boxer with great footwork. His feet almost glide across the ring in an effortless fashion. Boxers are generally great at skipping rope. Why don't we use more of this in baseball? This is the exact feeling of a New School shuffle.
3. Speed technique in stealing
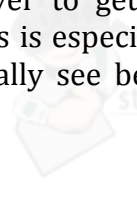   a. I generally teach the crossover step as the first trigger when starting.

        i. I understand some like to start with the right foot but the majority of the guys I work with get a faster steal start time with the crossover verbal cue even if they don't really do it.

       ii. We emphasize pulling the right arm back and ripping the left arm across the body to eliminate wasted movement.

b. I try to only give a couple of cues to remember to most of our guys about running form after the start. We try to emphasize the elbows at 90 degrees and getting the knees up.

c. Drills

       i. Skips, slow motion high knees, seated arm swings, high ladders.

          1. The high ladder, also known as the old football ladders, is a great tool for speed development in my opinion. I believe creating patterns (such as alternating feet or two feet in each box) force a player to get his legs moving and create good habits. This is especially good for young runners who can still really see benefits in speed training.