

SLIDING INTO BASES

Sliding is a skill that is not always correctly taught and at the youth level is often given little more than lip service. The good teams however, do teach this skill. It is not a natural action and requires good technique and practice.

It is important to overcome the fear factor in sliding. Fear of being hurt is the one thing that makes a base runner tentative and can cause injury rather than prevent it. Proper sliding must be executed at full speed and when a player slows down he is susceptible to injury. Don't leap, jump or tumble into a slide and don't slow down to prepare for one.

Bent Leg Slide- This is also called the "Figure Four Slide". Basically sliding is "controlled falling." Simply run and sit down at full speed, landing with one leg folded under the other. Slide on the side of the calf and hamstring, not the buttocks. Slide straight into the base. Runners should also slide with their hands high to avoid injury.

1. The lead leg (top leg) should be slightly flexed at the knee and extended toward the base with the toes up. This is the leg that makes first contact with the base.
2. The hands should be thrown back and up, not dragging on the ground.
3. The head should be up and watching the base.
4. The 'tuck' and lead legs should form a figure four.

Although some coaches teach players to use either leg, we like to have our players use their left leg as their bent leg. This makes them quicker if they go into a pop-up slide. If they used their right leg as the bent leg they would have to step over the base, taking longer to advance. (Another one of the "little things.")

It is very common to see young base runners slide with their hands down or on their side, or their head back touching the ground. This is poor technique and can lead to injury as they advance. At higher levels the speed of the game becomes much faster and poor technique can lead to injury or ineffectiveness.

- **Pop-Up Slide.** The same as a bent leg slide, only the runner slides later (harder) and stops abruptly by planting the cleats of the lead foot and pushing up on the calf of the folded leg immediately after landing. He does not use his hands. By keeping his head up when he runs and slides a savvy base runner can see that he has a play beaten and can use his momentum to pop up as he contacts the base. This will afford him the luxury of taking the extra base in case of an overthrow.
- **Head first slide.** This is really a "hands first" slide. Run full speed, lean/fall forward and then dive out landing on the palms of your hands first. (Palms down-fingers up.) The heels of your hands and the upper chest take the brunt of the fall. You can use either foot to launch your slide. Do not take a high leap into the air but a low horizontal dive into the base. Dig the toes into ground as a brake to stop the slide. The head first slide is faster than the Bent Leg Slide because the momentum of the runner's upper body is already falling forward as he slides head first.

LL does not allow the head first slide except when returning to a base. From age 13 and up, however this slide is allowed and should be taught. (It will also help players defensively as they learn to lay out for ground and fly balls.)

- In breaking up a double play, slide hard into the base using a bent leg slide. The runner is not allowed to slide on either side of the base in this situation. He must slide into the bag. (To avoid injury to the infielder. This is the rule all the way up to the professional ranks.) Keep the forward leg down, below the player's knee.

Because you are teaching young players how to overcome their fear of sliding and you are teaching good technique, make the practice of this skill as easy on them as possible. We do not recommend teaching sliding on the clay of the infield. Keep that for games. **Build confidence; don't instill fear.**

At the youth level we use a large heavy cardboard box, flattened out to create a smooth sliding surface. (Refrigerator box from an appliance store or a large box from an auto body shop.) Place it on the outfield grass and have your players one by one, run 60 feet and slide onto the box.

At higher levels you can use a rain day to teach sliding. Have your players slide on the wet outfield grass. In either case have them remove their baseball shoes; no spikes. You do not want them to suffer an injury when you are teaching this skill. Have them run in their stocking feet.

Correct sliding technique is an integral part of good base running and will often make the difference between safe or out, winning or losing.