

# TIPS ON FIELDING THE BACKHAND

Teaching the backhand properly is a tough thing to do as a coach, and yet a very necessary skill for our infielders to possess. Here's a question I received from a coach who was struggling with how to teach this skill to her players:

*QUESTION - "A common problem my players have is the backhand pickup. Could you maybe give me some pointers on how to get my players into the correct body/head/glove position. Most of my girls can't/won't dive so they tend to try lunge over the leg to get the ball and obviously can't get down low enough because the leg is in the way. I demonstrate proper technique all the time but I don't have a good drill to work the backhand specifically. I've tried setting up two beacons with the fielder standing to the right of the 1st Beacon. Then hitting/throwing the ball to the 2nd beacon which is far enough away that they have to either cross over step or dive. It sort of works but I'm sure there is something better to do?"*

*ANSWER – "Let's take a look at the backhand so we can better understand all the phases of this skill as well as some simple ways to teach it to our players"*



Forehand



Backhand

## What is a Backhand ? –

Balls that are hit to the player's throwing hand side that he/she must reach across her/his body (and as a result turn their arm over) in order to field are called "**backhands**". The key is the player's elbow. When a player is "backhanding" the ball she/he is not only fielding the ball on the throwing-hand side of their body, but they have also turned their arm over so their elbow is facing where the ball just came from. When fielding balls directly in front of them or else on the forehand side, players will have their elbows facing either down or toward the outfield.

The 2 pictures above show the player on the left fielding a "forehand" which is a ball on the glove side of her body. The player on the right is using a "backhand" since he is reaching across his body and fielding the ball on his throwing hand side. Notice where the elbow is pointing with each player; on the left, the player's elbow is pointing down (or toward the outfield) and she is using a "forehand". The player on the right has his elbow facing homeplate (where the ball just came from) and is using a "backhand".

**IN ORDER TO BACKHAND A BALL, THE PLAYER WILL:**

- 1) **Turn their bellybutton to face the place where they will field the ball.**
- 2) **Turn their feet (toes) to point in this same direction.**
- 3) **Bend both knees & keep their rear end low.**
- 4) **Crossover step using their glove-hand side foot to step across their body toward the point where they will field the ball.**
- 5) **Open their glove over so the thumb is facing themselves and their elbow is facing the direction where the ball is coming from.**
- 6) **If the ball is hit HARD – approach the ball on a backwards angle to allow more time to make the play.**
- 7) **If the ball is hit SOFT – angle in on the approach to the ball to field the ball sooner and thus get rid of the ball sooner.**
- 8) **After fielding the ball, continue past the catch (if possible) in order to avoid pulling up too soon and missing the play all together.**

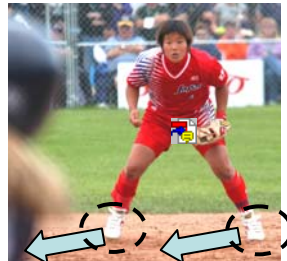
The player should make sure they keep their glove open to allow the ball to get into it, and that they keep their palm facing the ball instead of facing the ground as some players will tend to do.



Ready Position



#1



#2

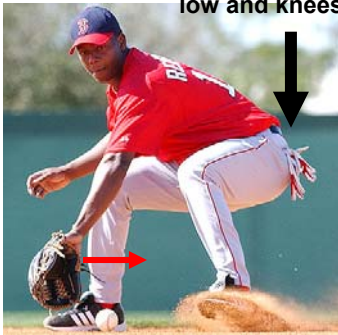


#4A



#4B

**GOOD – rear end is low and knees are bent**



#5

Thumb facing the fielder (which also turns the players elbow toward the direction where the ball came from)

**BAD – rear end is too high and knees should bent more bent**





**Incorrect** – the player is using a “forehand” glove motion on a ball that she should be “backhanding”, Also notice the her knees are not bent and her rear end is not low.



**Incorrect** – the player is backhanding the ball but notice that her glove is closed so the ball cannot enter it. Players should spread their hands open inside the glove so the glove opens up as wide as possible (see the last picture below)

Also – this players knees aren’t bent enough which is causing her to lean forward too much and she will most likely lose her balance prior to throwing the ball



**Correct** – this player has done a good job of opening up his glove to the ball. He’s also watching the ball all the way into his glove and bending his knees as well. Notice that this player is fielding the ball without using the crossover step – that’s ok and is necessary on some types of hard hit balls.



**Incorrect** – this player is losing her balance while fielding the ball and will waste too much time trying to regain her balance that she won’t be able to throw out the runner. She needs to keep her chest lower to the ground when fielding the ball and make sure that both feet are on the ground instead of being on her toes.



**Correct** – this player is doing an excellent job of opening up his glove to the ball, of turning his glove the proper way for a backhand, of watching the ball into his glove and of bending his knees to stay low on the ball.

## Progression Steps for Teaching the Backhand



**Step 1** – place a ball on the ground on the backhand side of your player. Have her/him get into their ready position and then have them execute each of the 8 previously mentioned steps for fielding a backhand. Make them say these steps out loud as they are executing each one. Make sure they stay low throughout the backhand.

Have your player do it slow at first to make sure they're executing the correct movements.



**Step 2** – *slowly* roll a ball on the ground on the backhand side of your player from a short distance in front of him/her. Have your player execute each of the 8 previously mentioned steps for fielding a backhand faster this time. Make sure they stay low throughout the backhand.

Have your player do it slow & EARLY at first to make sure they're executing the correct movements.



**Step 3** – place a ball on the ground on each side of your player. Have her/him get into their ready position and then point to one of the balls and have them execute the footwork and glove work to make either a forehand or a backhand play on the particular ball.

Have your player do it slow at first to make sure they're executing the correct movements.



**Step 4** – slowly roll ball on the ground to either side of your player. Have her/him get into their ready position and execute the footwork and glove work to make either a forehand or a backhand or a forehand play on the particular ball. You **MUST** do this **SLOWLY** at first so the players can learn how to judge where the ball is going in relation to their body and to learn do execute the movement **EARLY** enough so they can field the ball before it goes past them

After you roll the balls slowly and the player seems to be able to do this successfully then you can begin to hit ground balls to the player **SLOWLY**.....work gradually from slow to kind of slow to not so slow to medium to fast. **DO NOT** start at fast or else your players will **NEVER** learn the backhand properly.