

The Outfield --

What qualities do you want in an outfielder?

by Charles Trotman

What qualities do I want in an outfielder? The answer is not as straightforward as one might think. All coaches have an idea of the requirements for each position. For me, they fall into two categories, ideal and realistic. If you coach at a college, you have the ability to recruit players to meet your needs. You have a better chance at meeting the "ideal" standard. I coach at a rural public high school with about 400 students in grades 9-12. Therefore, I have a somewhat limited selection of potential players. I tend to be forced into the "realistic" area.

I believe that games are won or lost based on routine or "easy" plays.

All teams make about the same number of spectacular plays.

Champions make the routine ones better than their opponents. I try to make this philosophy the basis for my player selection process as well as my coaching style. The following standards could and should be applicable to all positions.

The two most important qualities my outfielders must possess are intelligence and the ability to make the routine plays. Intelligence is first because their responsibilities include a great deal of situational analysis, on the fly thinking and decision making. The ability to make routine plays is important because regardless of how fast a player is, or how strong an arm she has, she can't help the team if she can't catch an easy fly ball. She also must have a strong work ethic. Every year, I tell my players at our first preseason meeting that there are numerous teams with championship talent. There are, however, few with championship work ethic.

Outfielders are often considered inferior players because of the actions and attitudes in the younger leagues. By the time the players reach high school, many of them (along with their families) also share those feelings. If we coaches are to be true to our game and, more importantly, to our players, we must stop this. To that end, I try to meet with all the little league softball coaches in our area each season.

Most of them have little, if any, background in fastpitch softball. At those meetings, I try to share the experience of my 25 years in the game. I also try to outline to them my philosophy of coaching and what I would like the players to know when they reach high school. That includes stressing that ALL positions are equally important to a successful program.

Despite my best efforts, I know there will always be players who feel insulted to be put in the outfield.

Sometimes I am able to change that.

Other times, they retain that attitude. One of my favourite things to tell my outfield group is "you are not in the outfield because you're not good enough to be an infielder. You're there because you are too good to be an infielder."

In conclusion, no successful team at any level accomplished what they did without nine strong players on the field. Contrary to the attitudes of still far too many coaches at the lower levels, outfielders are among the most important players on the team. On my teams, they are frequently the most intelligent and most athletic on the squad. For example, in a four-year period between 1997 and 2000, my teams placed 30th, 14th, 19th and fourth respectively, in the NFCA National High School academic ratings. All four years, the winner of the top scholar award on the team has been an outfielder.