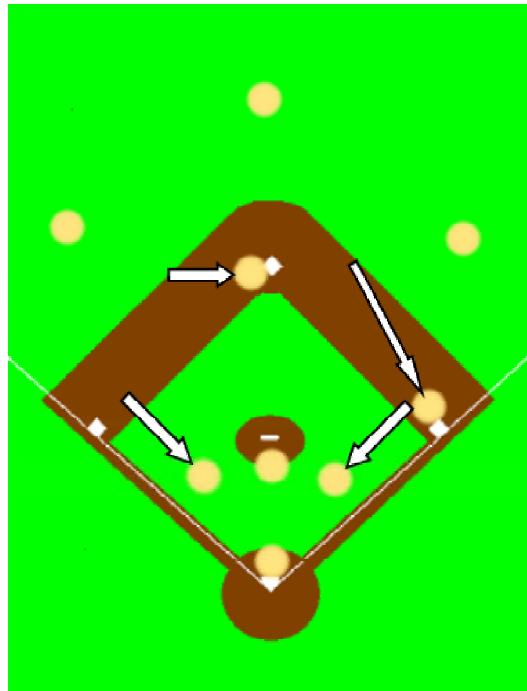


Bunt Coverages

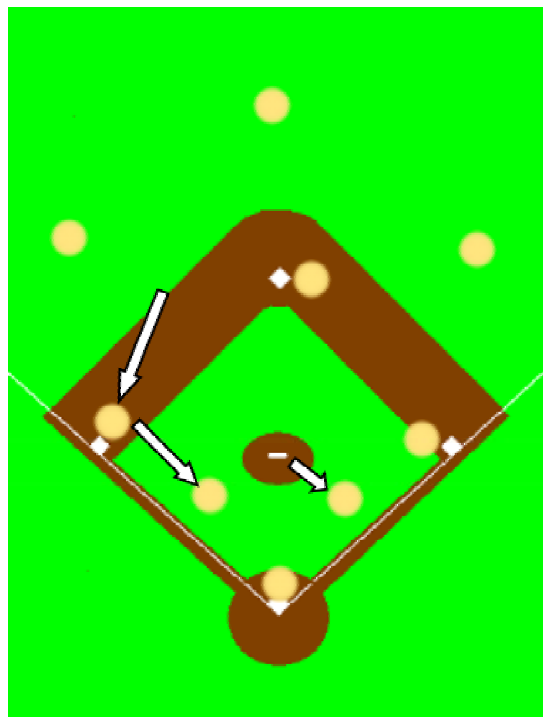
Sometimes a situation will arise in a game where a team calling for a bunt to be executed may be more obvious than in others. For instance, with certain parts of the order up, such as the one and two hitters or the eight and nine hitters, traditionally they may be more of a bunting threat than other parts of the order due to their speed, size and/or general ability to handle the bat well for a bunting situation. However, no matter what part of the order is up and no matter if it is an obvious situation where a team may try to lay down a sacrifice or less obvious situation where a player may be trying to bunt for a base hit, the idea is to be prepared for every possible bunting scenario defensively.

With no runners on base, ideally a team will call for its infield to have their corners charge in (the 1st and 3rd basemen) to field a bunt off of their respective lines with the pitcher and catcher left to field what they can in front of them. With this fairly straightforward approach, responsibility for covering first base goes to the second baseman leaving second base to be covered by the shortstop. If a team is anticipating the possibility of a bunt with no one on, or even in other bunting situations with baserunners occupying bases, each infielder will cheat a step or two in the direction to which their responsibility lies if a bunt is executed. They cheat enough to make the play comfortably but stay wary of the possibility the hitter will swing away.



Bunt coverage where corners take responsibility for foul lines

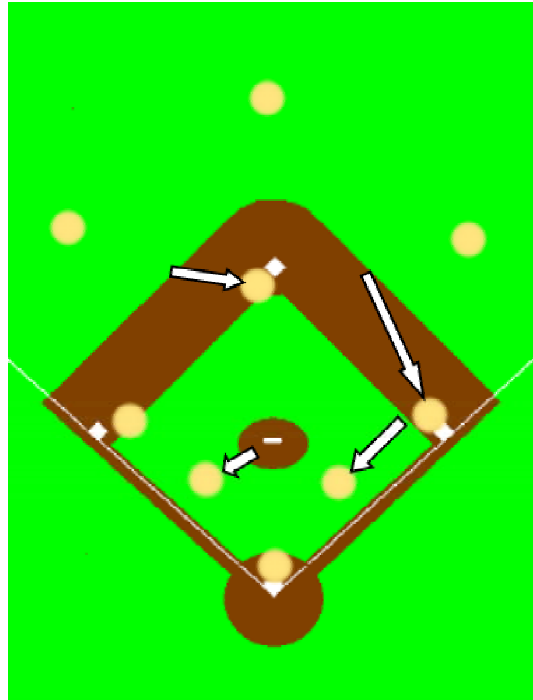
When a runner occupies first base, the first baseman has responsibility to hold the runner on at first. Therefore, a good bunt coverage to have in place would be one that requires the third baseman to cover the third base line, the pitcher to cover the first base line and the catcher left to get what he can in front of him. As for the bases needing to be covered, this leaves the first baseman responsible for first base with the second baseman responsible for second and the shortstop moving over to cover third. This helps avoid a situation that the first bunt coverage mentioned with no one on base could possibly create where the runner from first advances to second on the bunt then has the notion that he may be able to reach third because no one has assumed responsibility for the bag defensively. This coverage is also a nice coverage to have in place in a first and third situation, because the first baseman still has responsibility to hold the runner on and the third baseman can move down the line with the runner if a squeeze play has been called by the offensive team.



Bunt coverage where third baseman covers the third base foul line and pitcher covers the first base foul line

When a runner occupies second as the lead runner, in other words, he is the only runner occupying second base or there is a runner at first and second, responsibilities of the infielders to cover a bunt change. In this situation, the first baseman takes charge of the first base line with the pitcher switching his focus on a bunt over to the third base line (again, the catcher covers what he can in front of

him). This allows the third baseman to stay at third in anticipation of a possible out to be made on the lead runner if the bunt is fielded in enough time. It also allows the third baseman to cover third in the event the hitter fakes a bunt trying to draw the third baseman in and leave third base open for the runner at second to steal. As for the other infielders, the shortstop will assume responsibility for second base with the second baseman shifting over to first.



Bunt coverage where first baseman covers the first base foul line and pitcher covers the third base foul line

If the bases are loaded, then the first scenario mentioned that brings the corners in and the pitcher covering what is in front of him is a good coverage to have in place. This allows for the defense to cut down on the offense's areas where they can place a bunt and maximizes the chances for a force at home plate. With only a runner at third, this can also be an effective coverage. The thing to keep in mind, though, is because there is the possibility of other runners on the basepaths, third base becomes vulnerable to being open. Therefore, once the bunt is fielded, someone must hustle to third to assume coverage. If the third baseman does not field the bunt, then he should go back to the bag. If the third baseman does field the bunt, then the pitcher covering third becomes the best option.

No matter what the situation with runners on base, a defense needs to be prepared. An ideal way for a team to put pressure on a defense is their ability to bunt. The coverages for the different situations mentioned here are not the only ways to go about setting up a team's defense to guard against particular bunt

situations, however, they do provide a consistent manner in which an infield can be ready to defend the bunt with logical rationales. The idea is to make sure everything is covered and there are no holes left in the defense that the offense can take advantage of. As the situations with the runners on base change, so does the coverage. Though baseball may appear to be a simple, slow moving game to the naïve viewer, it is the understanding of these types of coverages that add to the beauty of baseball. A player on the field should never be bored whether he has received a lot of action his way during a game or not. With every hitter and every pitch, a player on defense must be able to anticipate what the offense may do. Through practice preparation and in game communication, every player on defense should have the mindset that he has some sort of responsibility. Whether it is covering a base, backing one up, or fielding the ball itself, a player should make every effort to move to a point where he can potentially become part of the play.