

Choosing an Infield Glove

Outstanding in the Field

By Ray Hernandez



The Infielder's Best Friend: Part One

While for the outfielder the choices are numerous, they are not nearly as complex as they are when it comes to infielders gloves. With glove manufacturers increasingly emphasizing "position specific" model, things can get even trickier when selecting a glove for infield play. With a growing number of manufacturers and models available, buying a new gamer can be a complicated process. In this column, as in the outfield version, I hope to simplify the process with by offering some position specific perspective on available glove models paying particular attention to the essential features that every infielder needs to consider in buying a new glove: size, Web style, back style, and pocket. The most efficient way for us to do this is simply to go position by position.

Let's Take it From the Middle

We will begin our journey in the middle of the infield at second base. For the middle infielder the top priority is to field the ball cleanly and make a fast transfer from the glove hand to the throwing hand. This usually calls for a smaller glove with a relatively shallow pocket designed to assist the infielder with a speedy transfer from the glove to the throwing hand by making the ball easy to get out of the glove. Middle Infielders also tend to prefer an open backed glove for increased flexibility and comfort.

Second base is where you will generally find the smallest gloves on the diamond, as the chief concern here is a speedy transfer for turning the double play. Generally speaking second base gloves run from 11 to 11 ½ inches in size. When it comes to the webbing second sackers tend to prefer either an old school single patch web, basket web, or, the currently popular I-web. There are a number of really good options available in this category.

Wilson offers a couple of different models from their A2000 line (\$159-\$189): the X2TB 11inch with a single patch web, and the very popular 1786 TB at 11 ½ inches with an I –web (although Wilson calls it an h-web). The Wilson models feature sturdy and pliable pro-stock leather that with just a little work will break in very nicely and last well. If you are inclined to kick it up a notch and go for a little luxury, Wilson's new A2K (\$279) line offers two models that fit well here: the A2K 1788 at 11 ¼ inches with an I-web and the A2K 1786 which is the 11 ½ inch version. These gloves are clearly the cream of the Wilson crop, and may be the most comfortable gloves currently being made.

Mizuno offers the second sacker a number of excellent options in its Classic Pro line (\$169) as well: the 11 inch GCP 40 which features a single patch web is compact glove that features wonderfully soft and pliable leather. For those that prefer the I-web, there is the GCP46 also at 11 inches. For a slightly larger model (11.25) there is the GCP 47 which comes with the I-web and a notch- back (an open back with a smaller opening) for a touch more control. There is also an 11.25 inch T-web (basically a single post) model available (GCP60). These gloves break in very easily and mold nicely to the shape of your hand.

As with Wilson, Mizuno offers a luxury Pro limited line at approximately \$299. For the second baseman, this line offers an 11.25 inch model (GMP5) which is a finely crafted piece of Japanese Deguchi leather with a single patch web and a relatively shallow pocket designed for speedy scooping and transferring on the double play. There is no disputing that this glove is a great piece of leather, however, along with the extra cash, it will require a substantial break in period.

Of course, Rawlings offers a variety of relevant models. In their oil tanned steer hide, "Heart of the Hide" line (\$159) there is the Pro217NB. In the more luxurious, kip-leather Pro-Preferred line (\$239) there is the Pros121C. If you are looking for a glove that might also be a collector's item as well, then perhaps you might want to try the Pro-Preferred 50th anniversary edition's ProsNP2-50 (\$299). Finally Rawlings also has an offering in their new Primo line (\$399); The PRM1125. As I mentioned in the outfield article, The Primo glove is made of fabulous Italian hand crafted and sewn leather that is firm but relatively easy to break in, in my opinion. The comfortable fit and brilliant hand stitched welting seem great, however it really is too early to tell whether the softer Italian leather will be truly durable. All four of these gloves measure at 11.25 inches and feature a flat pattern with a shallow pocket that is designed for the two handed scooping and rapid transfer that are the bread and butter of the second sacker's life.

If you are looking for something just a little bigger in a Rawlings glove, then I recommend that you consider the Pro-Preferred Pros15SCB. At 11.5 inches with an I-web, it is perfectly suited for second base play, while offering just a bit more range than the smaller models.

If you are feeling adventurous this season, however, you might want to consider Akadema's AXX-105 11.5 inch model. This glove made of soft, light, kip leather features their trademark "Reptilian" design. This is a fingerless (though completely legal) design that, having no break points in the glove creates a pocket that really does function like a scoop, and is perfect for second base play. Note: These gloves will take some getting used to. They are notoriously snug, but once you get them on and work them a bit, they really are like an extension of your hand. While there are many attempts at introducing technological innovation into glove making, the AXX-105 is one that actually succeeds in offering something both unique and effective. In addition, the price is right for a kip leather glove at \$149!

At **shortstop**, there is more emphasis on ball snagging ability, especially on those frequent trips deep into the hole to snag a grounder, and, as a result, gloves tend to run a little larger, running from about 11 ½ to 12 inches. Here again there are entries available from the usual suspects

Rawlings of course offers the ever popular Prodj from their "Heart of the Hide" line (\$159). This is a classic 11.5 inch model with a woven basket web made popular by Yankee shortstop Derek Jeter. It is constructed of oil tanned steer hide, which in my opinion, while speeding up the break-in process, is a step backward by Rawlings when it comes to

durability. It is however a popular, and by all accounts very good glove. Also in this line is the pros200-4JBT. At 11.5 inches this glove features the modified trap web popular among numerous major league shortstops such as: Edgar Renteria of Atlanta, Khalil Greene, of San Diego, and JJ Hardy of Milwaukee. There is also a version of this glove available in the "Pro Preferred" line as well (Pros15TCB). Rawlings also offers 11.75 inch model (Pros17IC) and a 12 inch model (Pros 20CHB (which can also be used at third base) in the "Pro Preferred" line.

Wilson also offers a couple of different models from their A2000 line (\$159-\$189): the 1787BT 11.75inch with an I-web, and the very popular 1786 TB (also mentioned in the second base section) at 11 ½ inches with an I –web (Note again that Wilson calls the I-web an h-web) Again the A2K line offers a 1787 I –web model also at 11.75 inches.

Finally, Mizuno offers the GCP61 and GCP 67, from the "Classic Pro" line as well as the GMP6 from the "Mizuno Pro" line. The GCP61 is an 11.5 model with a modified trap web. The GCP 67 (which as the model used by Miguel Tejada only comes in orange and black) and the GMP% both feature Mizuno's T-web, which is simply their own version of the old school single post web.

Life on the Hot Corner

They don't call **third base** the hot corner for nothing. For the third sacker the top priority is: glove the ball! Accordingly Third Basemen tend to prefer a mid-sized glove generally 11.75 to 12 inches with a deeper pocket than the shortstop or second baseman, and a sturdy web for snagging those hot smashes down the line. For the most part, third sackers seem to prefer an open back glove, and either a Dual –post H web, or I-web.

Fortunately there are some excellent choices available with two models really standing out. One is the Mizuno GMP5 from their Pro limited line (\$299). While I know that it is costly, and as I have mentioned before, requires a serious break in period, the leather on this glove is really sturdy and molds nicely to the hand. The notch back style, which offers a blend of the control of the fast back style with a slightly larger opening, serves to both increase control and protect the glove hand. Finally, it certainly, doesn't hurt that this is the glove of choice for two of the best third basemen in baseball: Scott Rolen of St. Louis, and Oakland's Eric Chavez. Note: Mizuno also offers a model very much like this in their Classic Pro line, the GCP-50, which is considerably less expensive, and a really fine glove with similar features.

My second top pick in this category is the Wilson A2K DW5. This is a 12 inch honey, with a dual post H- web, made of the best of Wilson's pro-stock leather. At the risk of being redundant, let me say again, these gloves are incredibly comfortable from the moment you put one on. In addition, this glove is flexible and pliable while maintaining its shape; and can be game ready in relatively short order. This feature alone might give it the edge over the Mizuno GMP5, depending on your needs and patience level. Finally, if you play both infield and outfield, this glove may very well suffice for both positions quite nicely.

A Word about Web Styles

While the choice of a web style is largely about personal preference there is some logic behind the designs that I thought I'd pass along

Single Patch Webs: These webs, because they are solid pieces of leather attached to the pocket by double X lacing, aid the infielder in getting the ball out of the glove

fast and eliminate the possibility of the fingers getting stuck in the webbing on the transfer. These are generally used by middle infielders.

Basket webs: Have the same advantages as Single patch webs plus the stability of being more securely attached to the glove (some would argue that this inhibits pocket development), and the basket weave offers flexibility.

Trap and Modified trap webs: These webs, being a single piece of leather attached to the body of the glove with abundant lacing offer flexibility and are great for snagging or trapping the ball.

I-webs: These webs offer greater flexibility allowing the infielder to snag the ball more securely and get it out of the pocket quickly. They also stop the spin of the ball when it hits the glove.

H-Webs: These webs are sturdy and flexible. They also allow for improved sight line on pop ups in the infield and fly balls in the outfield. These are often found on the left side of the infield and in the outfield.

T-Webs/Single Post webs: These webs, constructed of a single horizontal and a single vertical bar offer flexibility and helpful sight lines, similar to the H-webs.