

BASICS

Catchers should work to maintain a proper stance at all times; feet roughly shoulder width apart, knees bent approximately ninety degrees, butt up, back relatively flat and weight slightly forward on the balls of the feet. The catcher should be positioned behind the hitter just far enough that the catcher cannot reach up and touch the hitters rear elbow.

Whenever the catcher takes a stance, it is imperative that he keeps his gear between himself and the baseball. This means squatting so the shin guards remain in front of his body instead of taking the single knee or split positions now common in Major League Baseball. That is a more advanced technique and it exposes sections of the catcher's legs to injury from errant throws and foul balls.

It is equally imperative that a catcher always protects his throwing hand. The most common ways to do this are (i) tuck it behind the back or (ii) make a tight fist and place it directly behind the glove. Option (ii) is common to decrease the time required to make a throw but it requires constant discipline - this is recommended only for older players. Do not tuck the hand behind a shin or foot, as it is susceptible to injury from foul balls.

Lastly, catchers should never turn their heads away from the pitcher when receiving or blocking a ball. Looking forward keeps the gear in front of the catcher as opposed to turning away which can expose the catcher's neck, throat, ears, etc.

CATCHING/FRAMING

Receiving (Basic):

Working barehanded, player assumes a catching stance. From 20' away, coach tosses and catcher receives balls with only the thumb, index and middle finger of his catching hand. This improves eye-hand coordination along with the player's ability to close his hand around the ball. For an added challenge, use a (bouncier) tennis or rubber ball.

Receiving Drill (Intermediate):

The catcher, wearing a mask and glove sets up approximately 30' away from the coach. Coach throws the ball overhand and the catcher works on receiving while looking through the mask and catching the ball in the web of his glove. The catcher should also focus on not blinking; a habit that should be reinforced when catching live at-bats.

Framing Drill (Advanced):

Using the Receiving Drill setup, position the catcher behind home plate and add framing; work on catching the outer half of the ball and rotating the glove toward the strike zone. Do not yank the glove over the plate. Use a subtle movement that finishes with the glove around the perimeter of the plate for inside, outside and high strikes.

Low Framing Drill (Advanced):

For low strikes, the catcher should catch the ball with his glove moving upward. The goal is to create the illusion that he is reaching up to catch a pitch that might otherwise be seen as too low. Again, try to do this with subtle movement and stop the glove at the point of the catch. Do not yank the glove.

BLOCKING

Blocking Drill (Basic):

In full gear, the catcher starts in a blocking position: (i) on his knees, (ii) glove palm-up with the webbing touching the ground, (iii) throwing hand tucked behind the glove, (iv) shoulders rolled slightly forward, and (v) chin tucked against the chest. From 20' away, coach throws short hops into the catcher's glove and/or chest protector. This teaches proper positioning, demonstrates blocking (and not catching) the ball, reinforces the need to keep the gear between the catcher and the ball, and mitigates any fear of being hit with a ball. This can also be done with tennis, rubber or soft baseballs.

Blocking Drill (Intermediate):

In full gear and starting in a catcher's stance, a coach approximately 30' away throws short hops and the catcher moves from a squat position to a proper blocking position to stop each ball.

Blocking Drill (Advanced):

Expanding upon the Blocking Drill (Intermediate), the coach randomly makes the errant throws left and right of center, forcing the catcher to move laterally. The catcher must rotate his body and square his shoulders to the ball. If done properly, the ball will bounce and stop in front of the catcher. If the ball caroms sideways, the catcher was not square to the trajectory of the baseball.

Blocking and Framing Drill (Advanced):

Moving back to approximately 40' away, the coach will randomize his throws. The catcher will frame or block each one as appropriate.

FOOTWORK AND THROWING

Bunt Defense (Basic):

Starting with a defender on first base and the catcher behind the plate, the coach stands in the batters box and drops a ball between home plate and the pitchers mound. The catcher comes out of his stance, picks the ball up with both hands, squares his feet to his target and makes a throw to first base. This is meant to simulate fielding bunts and dropped third strikes. The most important parts of this drill are (i) using both hands when picking up the ball and (ii) properly shifting your feet before making a throw.

Bunt Defense (Intermediate):

Starting with a defender on first base and the catcher behind the plate, the coach stands in the batters box and randomly drop balls in fair territory (simulated bunts) and balls in foul territory (simulated dropped third strikes). After fielding the ball, the catcher will work on making throws to the proper side of first base. For balls in fair territory, the ball is thrown to the fair side of the base and for balls in foul territory, the ball is thrown to the foul side of the base (the first baseman should yell "inside" or "outside" to indicate which side of the baseline he's covering). This is important so the catcher does not throw over a runner or across his running lane because that make it difficult and dangerous for the first baseman to complete the play.

Throwing Drill (Advanced):

With a fielder covering either second or third base, the catcher takes a stance behind the plate. From 15' away, the coach makes an underhand

toss to the catcher who receives the ball and works on transitioning and throwing to the covered base. This drill, meant to simulate throwing out a base stealer, develops quickness and focus on sound mechanical movements. This should be practiced at low speed to reinforce proper mechanics.

(For right-handed players.) The catcher's movements can be divided into three steps. First, receive the ball and jab step with the right foot; the right foot should land perpendicular to the intended throwing line, start the catcher's momentum toward his intended target and establish the push off point for the throw. Second, point the left shoulder toward the target, pull the ball out of the glove, rotate the ball to a four-seam grip, lift the ball to ear height while pointing it opposite the target, and step toward the target with the left foot. Lastly, shift weight into the left foot and throw to the intended base.

This is an extremely difficult skill, as each of the three steps has several components. When done properly, those components happen simultaneously (the key to quickness is no wasted movements). It is recommended that the catchers learn to do this in steps by doing it without regard for quickness until the motion can be repeated consistently well. Players will tend to rush the mechanics and try to throw the ball too hard. A shorter but quicker throwing motion is preferable to a long, slow motion that produces more velocity. For those that struggle with the distance of the throw, teach them to throw the ball to the

base on one long bounce. This produces the desired trajectory and eliminates the need to wind up before making the throw.

Older players are now taught to catch the ball and executed 90-degree jump-turn to a throwing position. This requires greater arm strength as the catcher initiates the throw with a pivot move instead of a full step. While in some ways the mechanics are easier, we do not recommend this for younger players. Moreover, the technique that utilizes the step is also the proper form for a pitchout so it remains worth mastering.

BACKSTOP DRILL

Backstop Drill (Basic):

Place nine balls behind home plate (3 forehand, 3 center, 3 backhand; 10', 15' and 20' from home) and position the catcher, in full gear, behind the plate with a coach covering home. Alternating forehand, center, backhand, the catcher sprints to a ball, slides on his right knee to stop (for a right-handed catcher), and tosses a ball (over or underhand) to the coach covering home. This will help to develop speed, fitness and coordination.

Backstop Drill (Intermediate):

For an added challenge, the coach will call out forehand, center or backhand for each try and the catcher will retrieve the appropriate ball until all balls are returned to the coach.