

FUNDAMENTALS
OF CATCHING

Catching Technique

Equipment:

- Check gear for any broken straps
- Wear gear tight, not loose
- Make sure straps on shin guards connect to outside of leg, not inside

Stance:

1. Relaxed position:

Relaxed position is when nobody is on base and there are less than 2 strikes on the batter.

- *Elbow bent at 90 degrees
- *Thumb up at 2 or 3 o'clock when giving the target
- This prevent you from jamming up your thumb on the inside and low fastball
- Target no higher than the catcher's knee - helps pitcher think about low strikes
- Weight distributed on the insides of the feet with a rounded back
- Knees are pinched together
- Throwing hand is behind the leg

2. Ready Position:

Ready position is when there are two strikes or runners on base

- Elbows are bent at 90 degrees
- Thumb is up for the target
- Target is no higher than the catchers knees and your elbow is outside your knee
- Butt is up and parallel with thighs
- Weight is distributed on the insides of the legs and feet
- Spread out your base of support
- Throwing hand is relaxed behind the glove
- Knees are over the toes
- Toes are pointed straight ahead

Framing:

- Catching the pitch for the umpire so he can see the pitch.
- All glove positions will be relative to the thumb for a right handed catcher.
- Arm position should be straight, with elbow locked when framing to stop the arm from being pulled out of the zone.
- Do not frame strikes!!!! Just catch it and hold it!

Inside and Low pitch:

- Thumb at 9 o'clock

Middle and Low pitch:

- Thumb at 9-10 or 3-6, make sure you ask the umpire how they prefer to see the ball
- 9-10 will show him the ball, 3-6 will not show him the ball

Outside and Low pitch:

- Thumb at 6-8 o'clock, this is the hardest pitch to frame and catchers need to be flexible to get to this pitch this way. It requires torso and lower body rotation to get there.

Inside and Up pitch:

- Thumb at 12-2 o'clock

Middle and Up pitch:

- Thumb at 2-5 o'clock

Outside and High Pitch:

- Thumb at 2-6 o'clock

Blocking The Pitch in the Dirt

** We do not expect our catcher to catch every low ball in the dirt, but we do expect him to block them so they don't get through to the backstop letting runners advance.

Technique for blocking the low pitch right in front of you

- Fall to your knees.
- Glove into the ground like a "pitch fork" and between the legs
- Bare hand behind glove.
- Relax your chest.
- You are not trying to catch the ball, you are trying to block it.
- Your chest protector acts as your glove
- Keep your body square to the ball.
- Hunch your shoulder forward.
- Elbows are bent and are next to the sides of your body
- Keep your chin down, so the ball doesn't fly up and hit you in the throat.
- Direct all balls back toward home plate. Keep the ball in front of you! If it's in front of you, you can still make a play.

Technique for blocking the ball in the dirt inside or outside

- Jab step with the near-side foot
- Drive off the opposite leg. Stay low. Get "around" the ball.
- Direct the ball back towards home plate

Common errors:

- Catchers turn their head
- Catchers leave their throwing hand exposed when blocking the ball
- Catchers lean back when blocking the ball
- Catchers have their forearms in the way of their chest protector when blocking
- Elbows are not bent
- Chin is not against the chest and throat is exposed
- Catcher is rigid at contact with the ball in the dirt

Suggestions:

- Anticipate a bad pitch in the dirt every time the ball is thrown
- Keep your thighs parallel to the ground when there are two strikes on the batter or there is a runner on base
- Relax your body at contact with the ball
- Try to "Stay Tall" with your torso when you are in a blocking position
- Lean slightly forward so that when the ball hits the chest it will be directed down towards the ground

The Pitch is Right or Left of the Plate:

*Same body position as a ball down the middle, except you need to aim the ball back towards the plate so you will have your right shoulder a little ahead of your left one directing the ball back towards the plate. Opposite shoulder for left of home plate.

Bunts:

1. In front of the plate, up to 5 feet away:
 - Pick up the ball by bending at the knees using the glove and bare hand.
2. First base Line:
 - Pick up by bending at the knees using the glove and hand. Secondly, clear yourself from the runner before throwing the ball by taking a cross-step behind with right foot. This gives the catcher a better angle to throw the ball to the bag.
3. Third Base Line:
 - Either round the baseball with your body facing the infield or turn your back to the infield and pick up and turn.

How to Catch Pop Flies/Fouls:

The important thing to remember is the idea of "infield drift". What this means is that any foul ball will tend to drift back toward the infield.

Technique for catching pop flies/foul balls!

- Find the foul ball.
- Turn your back to the infield.

- Throw your mask far enough away so that you don't trip over it. (Don't laugh, it's happened even to major leaguers!)
- RELAX ! You've got more time than you think.
- Raise your mitt above your chin.
- Catch the ball with two hands above your chin. Do not catch it "basket style" in front of your waist.
- Your elbows and knees act as shock absorbers to give a little when you make the catch.

Tags at Home Plate:

1.)Body position:

- *Left heel on the front corner of home plate that is closest to third
- *Bend at the knees and get into a good/stable athletic position

2.)Tag Technique:

- *Catch the ball first
- *Bring the glove directly to your left foot and bend at the knees
- *Push off with the left foot
- *Spin at contact
- *Look for the next play

Throws to second:

Ready Position:

- Anticipate the movement before the ball gets to you
- Slide step and then throw

Reminders:

- Move your body in the direction of second base at a 45 degree angle
 - Short stride with the front leg
 - The back foot should come up off the ground with the side of the foot going towards the sky. This helps the catcher stay on top of the ball and prevents him from throwing side arm which causes the ball to dive.
 - The lead glove should go out towards 2nd base and then back with the fingers of the glove to the heart
 - Throwing arm should go directly to ear and then release quickly.
- Catchers cannot have a long arm action---too slow!

Catcher Drills:

- One-knee throwing drill
- Two-knee throwing drill
- Soft hands drill
- Glove roll drill
- Framing drill
- Sway and frame drill
- Foul ball drill
- Quick hands drill
- Quick feet drill
- Quick release drill
- No hands drill
- Blocking drill
- Steal attempt drill
- Fielding bunts drill
- Force play at home drill
- Communication / Cut-off drill

FUNDAMENTALS OF CATCHING



"Catching is by far the most difficult and challenging position to play."

Catching may be the most demanding position in baseball, both physically and mentally. To be a quality catcher, you need to know more than how to catch the ball and how to throw the ball to second, you need to know the game of baseball. When we talk about knowing baseball, we mean knowing it as a coach tries to know it. As the catcher, you're the onfield coach. You have the entire field in front of you. Your team depends on you to make split second decisions that can determine runs vs. outs, wins vs. losses.

To illustrate this point we will set up a game situation:

Late in the game

Your team is up by one run

Runner on second

1 out

Number 3 hitter is up

What goes through the mind of the catcher before calling a pitch? Here are some possibilities:

- What has this hitter done in his previous at bats?
- What has the 4th hitter done? Maybe the 3rd hitter has hit the cover off the ball and the 4th hitter has struggled.
- Is the hitter a dead pull hitter or does he spray the ball?
- What does your pitcher have left in the tank? How is his control?
- Is the runner on second a threat to steal?

- Based on all that information, are the fielders positioned correctly?

Each of those questions determines which pitch you call and the location of the pitch.

After the pitch, the possibilities in just one play are numerous and the catcher must prepare to handle each of them.

A catcher likes being in the middle of the action, likes to think on his feet, and is not afraid of making split second decisions. Physical skills are also important, but a catcher who can handle the mental part of the position rises above the catcher with stronger physical skills.

Just take a look at the Major Leagues. Major catchers start who do not have great physical tools. You find better athletes sitting in the minor leagues. But these catchers have developed their physical tools to the point where they can make it at that level and have developed their mental skills to the point where they play over other players with better physical skills.

We hope this section will give you some of the information necessary to improve your ability to play this difficult position.

The Field General

The catcher needs to exert him or herself as the field general. Communication on the baseball field is necessary and a good catcher will take control. The catcher has the view of the entire field and can make the proper call for throws to each base.

APPROACH

LEADERSHIP

Prepare yourself to take charge. As the catcher you must be a strong leader. Catchers must know how to calm a pitcher who is upset about a certain call, an error made in the field, or his performance. In short, you have to handle the pitcher. You make sure he stays focused on the situation and the pitch he is about to throw. You must keep him focused and in the game. Even though pitchers are unique and you handle them differently, always show them that you have confidence in their ability to get the job done.

KNOWLEDGE

One of the first requirements as a catcher is learning as much about your pitching staff as possible. You need to know each pitcher's strengths and weaknesses. You must also learn how to call a game. Many times a coach may be calling the pitches from the bench, but you still must be in tune with the flow of the game and it's up to you to make sure the pitcher hits different locations by giving a good target. Learn as much information as you can about pitching. You need to be on the same page as the pitcher.

PRE-GAME

Talk to the starting pitcher after he has completed his warm-up. How does he feel? How is his control? What pitches is he having trouble with? What pitches are working well? Compare that with your impression from his warm-up. Use the information above to come up with an approach for the first time through the line-up. After a couple of innings you may notice that things that weren't working during the warm-up are working now.

SQUAT

Although the catcher must poses a number of skills to be a complete player, the fact is the catcher spends most of the game receiving the ball from the pitcher. Many young catchers don't realize the impact of what they do behind the plate and the affect that is has on the pitcher and the umpire. You will have an affect on the pitchers ability to be effective. Be determined to make that influence a positive one.

BODY POSITION

As a catcher you will have two basic positions from which you will receive the ball.

1. No baserunners

Get in a comfortable position where you will be squatting behind homeplate. This is a position that you will spend a lot of time in, so make sure it's comfortable. Since you are catching the ball with your left hand, you will want to position your feet so your left foot is slightly ahead of your right foot (just an inch or two). This will shift your body slightly to allow your left arm freedom to move without exposing the side of your body to being hit in an unprotected area by a foul tip.

2. Runner on first or second

Use the same basic position, with the difference being that you will spread your feet out farther apart and lift your backend up to be in a position to quickly throw the ball.

ARM POSITION

Your catching arm should be slightly bent at the elbow. Make sure you don't get your elbow positioned inside your left knee. This will inhibit your ability to move your arm to catch the ball.

RECEIVING

CATCHING THE BALL

The proper position of the body and glove is as important to a catcher as any other player on the field. The catcher must not only field the ball cleanly, but if the pitch is a borderline strike or ball, he must try to give the illusion that the pitch is a strike (a technique called framing). The goal is catch each pitch between your shoulders and to not move your glove quickly to the ball. One way to get set up to frame a pitch or to simply catch the ball is to shift your body smoothly toward the pitch as it comes toward you.

Let's say you set up to catch a ball over the center of the plate and the pitch is actually thrown on the outside corner. The umpire could call the pitch a strike or a ball, but your own actions can influence that call. If you stay in your position and flash your glove out quickly at the last second, the umpire will be inclined call the pitch a ball. On the other hand, if you slowly start to shift toward the location of the pitch as the pitch is delivered, the umpire will be more inclined to call it a strike.

The position of the glove is also important to promote the illusion that a pitch is a strike. For instance, you learned to catch a ball with your palm facing the center of the plate. But, on a low pitch (a borderline strike), if you catch the ball with the palm down, you give the umpire the impression that the pitch is too low. Always try to catch pitches that come across the plate at the knee or lower backhanded. Catching a low ball on your catching hand side is difficult backhanded, so make sure you shift toward the pitch; if it clearly isn't going to be a strike, shift and catch the ball with the glove fully opened and your palm up as shown in the diagram below.

Slightly bend your elbow when you catch the ball. Catching the ball with your elbow locked often causes the ball to bounce out of your glove because there is no give. When you bend your elbow, you absorb the blow of the pitch and can hold on to the ball.

GIVING A TARGET

A catcher who places his glove thigh high in the middle of the plate for every pitch is doing nothing to help the pitcher.

Help the pitcher be successful by positioning your glove as needed for each pitch. Because pitches, batters, and innings are unique, so too will be the position of your glove.

How do you give a target to help out the pitcher?

BODY POSITION

Move yourself, not just your glove. If you want the pitcher to hit the inside part of the plate, shift yourself over in that direction. Don't move the target after the pitcher has started his motion. It can be very distracting for a pitcher to be in the middle of his motion and he looks to the plate to pick up the target, only to find the catcher moving his body and target into position. Many catchers want to wait to set up so the hitter cannot pickup the pitch location. This is fine, but there is no reason to wait until the last second. Get in position before the pitcher picks up the target.

GLOVE POSITION

Pitchers, catchers, and coaches want the ball down in the strike zone. You can help the pitcher focus on this by giving him a low target with your fingers, facing forward toward the pitcher. This gives the pitcher a target at the bottom of the strike zone.

As the pitcher releases the ball, move your glove so it's in a vertical position. This allows you to: (1) open and turn your glove down for a pitch thrown down and in; or (2) close your glove and turn it down for a pitch thrown down and out.

BLOCKING

A good defensive catcher can block balls thrown in the dirt. That skill keeps runners from advancing and saves your team runs.

BE AGGRESSIVE

Once you determine that the pitch will bounce to you, aggressively go after the ball and try to shorten the distance between you and where it bounces. The closer you get to the point where the ball is going to bounce, the better chance you have to catch it. This doesn't mean that you want to lunge forward uncontrollably but don't sit back and hope the hits you. Waiting allows for larger hops and reducing the probability of blocking the ball.

TO YOUR RIGHT

If the pitch bounces to your right, shift in that direction to prepare and then drop your right knee to the ground. Put both hands in front of you and close to the ground to prevent the ball from bouncing between your legs. With your hands in front of you, round your shoulders, place your chin close to your chest, and try to keep you back straight. This provides the largest area for the ball to bounce off of; rounding your shoulders helps keep the ball in front of you after you block it.

If the pitch is outside and bounces to your right, step out with your right foot, then sit down on your right knee with your left leg extended out along the ground. Your upper body is in the same position as above.

One of the most common mistakes in blocking this "off to the side" ball is allowing your body to turn in that direction when you drop to block it. This causes the ball to bounce away from you instead of staying in front of you. In most cases this allows the baserunner to advance.

TO YOUR LEFT

If the pitch bounces to your left, follow the same directions as above, only to the other side.

STRAIT AT YOU

The ball coming right at you is the easiest to block. Simply drop both knees to the ground with both hands in front of you and in position. Remember to keep your knees apart and your back straight to provide the largest target.

BREAKING PITCHES

A fastball is the easiest to block since it bounces more true than a breaking pitch. With a breaking pitch, you must take into account the spin on the ball and the trajectory of the pitch. For example, a Curveball breaks down from a higher trajectory than a fastball. This results in a higher bounce than the fastball. The spin of the ball causes the bounce to go to one side or the other. To successfully block a Curveball, be aggressive in getting close to where it will bounce and position your body off center to account for the bounce. On a right-handed pitcher, position your body so the majority is to the left of where the ball will hit. That way when the ball hits and kicks back to the left because of the spin, you are in the correct position to catch it.

THROWING

Your ability to throw out a runner is influenced not only by the speed of the baserunner, but also by the ability of the pitcher to hold the runner close and deliver the ball quickly to the plate. While it's important to work with the pitcher to make sure this is done, once he has started his delivery, it's out of your control.

To have a chance to throw out runners on a consistent basis, work on delivering the ball quickly and accurately to the base. This requires good fundamentals on transferring the ball from your glove to your throwing hand, footwork, and throwing mechanics. Sound fundamentals can make up for a lack of arm strength.

Adjustments will need to be made depending on the location of the pitch, but for now assume the pitch is a fastball down the middle of the plate.

PRIOR TO CATCHING THE BALL

As the ball approaches, start setting yourself up for the throw by pointing your right knee toward the first base dugout. This causes your hips to rotate to the right and gets you closer to having your hips closed when you throw the ball.

GRIP

As with all positions, try to grip the ball across all four seams. Throw the ball with a 12 - 6 rotation (use digital camera to demonstrate the 12-6 rotation). Why is this essential? When throwing the ball, any tail pulls the fielder off the base and into the line of the runner. This is not only a dangerous situation for the fielder but the ball often ends up in the outfield.

THREE METHODS

There are three primary methods for throwing the ball from the catchers position.

SHIFT AND THROW

As you catch the ball, pop up and forward to throw the ball. As you do this, shift your feet from parallel to the mound to perpendicular to the mound. Land your right foot first and complete your throwing stride toward the base with your left foot.

PIVOT AND THROW

This method takes a very strong arm and because of this, shouldn't be used by younger players. Simply pivot on your right foot, step with your left and throw. While it is faster than the Shift method, it's more difficult because to achieve that quickness, your weight can't be transferred fully to your front leg. You end up using your arm primarily to throw the ball without getting your body behind it.

STEP AND THROW

Younger players tend to use this method due to lack of arm strength as required for the Shift method. With this method, take a small step with your right foot towards the target as you transfer the ball. This gets your momentum moving in that direction. Once you have planted your right foot, point your left shoulder toward the target step with your left foot and throw. This method is slower but helps younger player make a stronger and more accurate throw.

FIELDING

POP-UP

When catching a pop-up in foul or fair territory, it's essential for you to realize that the ball will curve towards the infield as it comes down. Once you have located the ball, you want to make sure you run to where you will catch the ball and then discard your mask. If you drop it immediately, you may end up tripping over it as you track the ball.

Except for a pop-up, when fielding balls out in front of the plate you want to get your mask off and out of the way as quickly as possible.

BUNT OR SLOW ROLLER DOWN THE THIRD BASE LINE

If the ball stops just a few feet in front of the plate, you will want to round the ball keeping yourself facing the field and getting yourself in a good position to scoop the ball and throw to first. If there are runners on base, this is also the ball that will give you the opportunity to throw out the lead runner. As you approach the ball, you will want to scoop the ball with both your glove and throwing hand. This will give you a better of fielding the ball cleanly over using your glove hand or bare hand alone. Since you are fielding it between your legs and you have rounded the ball, you're in a great position to scoop the ball and throw accurately.

If the ball is farther down the line, you will not have the time to round it. In this case you will take a direct line towards the ball. As you reach the ball, step over it and plant your right leg. You are then in a good position to scoop the ball, turn, step and throw.

BUNT OR SLOW ROLLER DOWN THE FIRST BASE LINE

If the ball stops a few feet from home, you will use the scoop method described above to field the ball. The main difficulty with the play is avoiding the runner as you throw the ball to first. A good baserunner will run down the inside part of the baseline making it more difficult to get the ball by him. The first baseman can help you out by standing clearly on the inside of the bag to give you a good target. You may still find that once you have scooped up the ball you need to move farther into fair territory to have a better angle to throw to first. Make sure you throw the ball overhand to eliminate the ball from tailing in toward the runner.

One of the most difficult plays is the ball that is hit or bunted farther down the first base line. Not only will the runner be closer to the base by the time you field it (making it more difficult to throw the ball without hitting him), but you may not have the time to scoop it and set up to throw. In this case you will need to barehand the ball and throw it sidearm to first base.

CATCHER'S STANCE

When in the throwing stance, you should be in a comfortable crouch, compact and relaxed.

Move your entire body to the location of the desired pitch, with your off-hand behind your back. Any time there is a threat of a runner stealing, your right foot should be a little behind the left (left heel to right toes), backside up, and the off-hand should be in a tight fist behind the glove.

Use good transition when throwing, whether the "rock in fire" or the "L" method.

You should stay low and move in one smooth action, ball and hands to ear, throw over the top quickly (hot potato).

When receiving the ball, be strong and smooth. Extend your arm and show the umpire the ball. Roll your wrists toward the center of the plate.

As the catcher, your body position when in the blocking stance should be the same as the throwing stance because this is used when there are runners on base or there are two strikes on the hitter.

Your feet should be shoulder width apart or more, with the wide base slightly leaning forward on balls of feet. Your backside should be up, and the off-hand in a tight fist behind the glove.

When blocking,
you need to immediately thrust the glove into the dirt between your legs.
Your bare hand will placed behind it, and you will fall to your knees.

As the catcher, angle your body towards the plate or in front of the plate and be somewhat upright. Your shoulders should roll forward, knees should remain wide, and your head should be kept down.

Do not attempt to catch the ball.

Instead you need to

block it.

To do this,
keep in front and jump to your feet.

FRAMING

When framing, you need to extend your arm, go get the ball, and hold the ball for the umpire to see. Roll your wrists toward the plate, but don't pull the ball.

Roll and extend in a smooth manner and avoid jerking or snapping the glove.

On low pitches, roll your wrists upwards.
**It is important to give the umpire a good view.
The catcher and the umpire need to work together.**

CATCHER'S SIGNALING

When signaling, you need to conceal the signals as you relay them to the pitcher.

To do this, your legs should be kept closed, and protect the signs with the glove-hand hanging below the gloveside knee. Your must also be kept in your crotch.

Signaling must be clear.

Spread your fingers when giving signals.

When communicating #2 or #3, use fingers that are separated rather than ones directly next to one another for easier viewing.

Also remember there are other ways of signaling. You do not have to use your fingers to relay the signs, a touch system or glove position system works just as well.

Always allow the pitcher to give input.

BLOCKING HOME

When blocking home, your left leg goes on the corner of the plate with the toe third base. You need to take away the front half of home and give the backside.

Your legs need to be bent but the knees should not be locked.

Stay low and catch the ball with two hands. You can protect the ball with your off-hand. In a swiping motion, bring the ball in low, pivot and drop the right knee and shoulders. With a continued swiping motion, graze the player, come up and show the ball. **Remember, the catcher can take some impact, but should also give it.

FIELDING BUNTS

When fielding bunts, **you need to always use two hands and scoop the ball.** Don't try to pick it up. When the ball is down the first base line or up the middle, circle the ball and overstep it. The ball should be between your legs. **Scoop** the ball with your body angled towards first base. Next, step back from the baseline and throw the ball to the inside or the outside part of the bag, which ever is communicated.

If the ball is down the third base line, you need to come around it with your back towards first base and overstep, to **scoop** the ball with your body angled toward first base.

FIELDING POP-UPS

When fielding pop-ups, you need to find the ball and **remove your mask**, keeping it in hand, and turn back to the infield. Next, get under the ball and throw your mask away. *You must call the ball at the point of climax.* As the catcher, you need to remember that infielders have priority over the catcher on pop-ups because it is easier for them to catch.

HOLDING RUNNERS ON

As the catcher, you need to keep runners off balance. You need to be **accurate, quick and strong**. You need to be able to make snap throws. It is important to make the runners think. To hold runners on, the catcher must always communicate with infielders on pick-offs.

BEING A LEADER

As the catcher, **you are the field general**. You must be loud and direct. You always need to know the situation and direct others to act appropriately. You anchor the team from behind the plate. **You must be the leader.**

Catching is by far the most difficult and challenging position to play. Moreover, a catcher must realize that this position requires more than just physical skills. It also requires a catcher, to have 'leadership skills because they are an extension of the coach on the diamond.

A wise person once said, *"If it were easy everyone would do it."* Well catching is certainly not something everyone can do.

Four-seam grip

ALWAYS throw the ball with a four-seam grip.

The four-seam grip



The four-seam grip is the basic grip for throwing a baseball.

This grip is used by everyone: Infielders, outfielders, pitchers and catchers.

When you play defense, you are essentially playing a game of catch

The better you play catch, the better you'll play baseball.

Related Drill: Pick spots on your partner where he can handle the ball, i.e. chest and face. Award points for hitting each spot; two points for the chest and one point for the head or vice versa. First person to accumulate 20 points wins.

This drill helps you learn to throw to a target. If you field a ball but can't make a strong, accurate throw, it doesn't do a bit of good.

THROWING MECHANICS

...the right way goes a long way

The objective of any throw is to hit the target provided. Generally, on a force play or cut-off throw the goal is to make the throw to the chest area of your target. On a tag play, the throw should be made roughly 15 centimetres (6 inches) above the dirt on the side of the base the tag is to be made.

If the throws consistently hit the mark, the throwing mechanics are most probably very good. However, if missing the mark is a regular occurrence, then mechanics most likely need correcting.

Factors to consider in having good throwing mechanics are:

- 1 - Grip;
- 2 - Stance;
- 3 - Arm Action and Follow-through.

With reference to grip, assuming the hands are big enough, the index and middle fingers should be on top of the ball roughly 1-2 centimetres (.5-.75 inches) apart at the tips of the fingers. The thumb should be located underneath the ball positioned between the index and middle finger. In terms of depth, the ball should be held on the finger tips so that a pocket of air exists between the palm and the ball. Finally, the ball should be held with a four seam grip (top fingers should be positioned perpendicular to the horse shoe formation of the seams). The four seam grip promotes the straightest flight for the ball, thereby, increasing the probability of an accurate throw. A two seam grip (holding the ball along two seams) promotes lateral ball movement and makes it more difficult to throw a straight ball.



Four Seam



Two Seam

With respect to stance, other than having the feet roughly shoulder-width apart and the weight on the balls of your feet, the most important factor is to point the glove shoulder at the target, in much the same manner a quarterback would. Therefore, a right-handed thrower would point his/her left shoulder at the target.

It is difficult to discuss arm action and follow through simply through words and images. There are numerous variables to consider. The two most important components, however, are throwing elbow positioning and follow-through path.

In order to minimize the strain on the throwing elbow the position of the elbow during the forward motion as it moves past the body should be at shoulder height or slightly higher (regardless of the throwing action is "over the top" or "three quarters"). If the elbow is below shoulder height it is only a matter of time until elbow injuries occur.



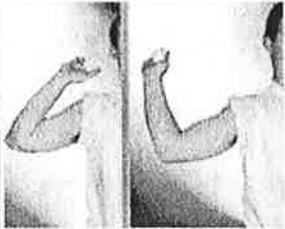

In reference to follow through it is extremely important the arm finish the path it has begun. Generally speaking, the arm should finish going by the left hip (if the thrower is throwing with his right hand). In doing so, the muscles generating the arm movement are allowed to maximize acceleration and efficiently decelerate the arm in a safe manner. Not allowing the arm to follow its natural follow through path forces many of the muscles to work extra hard to slow down the arm. This can result in injury and is

one aspect of what is referred to as
"short-arming the ball".



Therefore, to achieve good throwing mechanics the player must start with a good grip (four seam), point his/her glove shoulder at the intended target, while keeping a solid balanced stance and execute safe arm action and follow through.

Examples of Poor Throwing Mechanics

Dropping the elbow	Leading with the elbow	Inside-out motion/wrapping	Shot-put/pie throwing
			
This throw looks like a player "flicking" the ball with no power, speed or accuracy behind it.	The elbow is far ahead of the rest of the arm which makes it look like a dragging motion - this puts severe strain on the elbow and shoulder.	In this throw, the arm is usually wrapped around the head and on the forward motion it is brought around the side of the body.	Commonly used by catchers, only the arm is used - this throw also puts alot of strain on the elbow, and shoulder.

Catcher Body Position

Several factors come into play. A 'comfortable' squat, with the back straight is important. Catcher's position needs to be balanced, so they can move to the ball that is off the plate, or pop up to make a throw. Ideally the back/shoulders should be directly above the feet. This will allow that balanced position for quickness of movement. Leg muscles should be 'pre-loaded' as much as is comfortable for the individual, meaning they should raise their rear end up a few inches, if leg strength allows and keep their weight on the balls of their feet, all again for balance and quickness.

The hand-behind-the-back is a good way to start out new, young catchers, to help prevent throwing hand injuries until they learn more about the position. Later, beside or behind the throwing-side thigh will offer sufficient protection while keeping their hand closer to the mitt for quicker throwing and fielding of the low pitch. For the low pitch, stress having them go to their knees, then get the mitt down. Getting the knees down puts the gear-protected body in the best blocking position as quickly as possible. Then the mitt comes down to attempt to catch the ball, but if not caught, at least the chances are good that the ball will be blocked by the body and stay in front of the catcher.

Proper Position for Receiving a Throw to Home Plate

The proper position to receive the throw is in front of the plate. When awaiting the throw, the catcher does not set up to the side of the plate, nor does he straddle the plate. In most youth leagues, and also in high school play, it is illegal for the catcher to block the plate before he has the baseball in his possession.

To position himself for a normal tag play, the catcher should execute the following steps.

- 1) Always leave his mask on. The mask stays on for safety, and because he will consistently keep his head down on the throw and look the ball into his glove. With the mask off, catchers are prone to flinch and pull their head off the ball. They react with more confidence with the mask in place.

- 2) On any fair hit ball, move to the front of the plate and anticipate a throw. Like any other baseman, the catcher's job is to guard his base. He cannot protect his base by standing behind it. He needs to be in a good defensive position before any play at the plate begins to develop.
- 3) The catcher can be as much as one foot length in front of the plate and still be in excellent position to block the plate once the throw is received.
- 4) The direction of the throw will dictate the catcher's initial set up position. Use the front corners of the plate as guide points. Set up with left foot off the left front corner on throws from left field and center. On throws from right-center to right field, the catcher sets his right foot adjacent to the right front corner.
- 5) Stay low and relaxed. Knees are bent and butt is down.
- 6) Give the runner the back half of the plate. The idea is to let the runner have a clear shot at plate, at least the catcher wants the runner to think he has a clear shot. What the catcher gives as he prepares to receive the throw, he quickly takes away after he catches the ball. With correct footwork, this is easy to do. Remember, the catcher's first priority is to catch the ball.
- 7) After he catches the ball, he grasps it with his throwing hand. With the ball gripped tightly in his throwing hand, he places his hand inside the mitt. Contact with the runner is made with the back of the mitt.
- 8) Once the throw is caught, with his left foot the catcher takes a quick step onto the third base line. Both his toe and his knee are pointed directly down the third base line at third base. In this position, he has the entire plate blocked. This is also the safest stance for the catcher to assume prior to the tag. With his knee facing the runner, the risk of injury is greatly reduced. Any contact that is made will not buckle the knee from the side.
- 9) The catcher stays low and maintains good leverage. He tags the runner, and then spins around to face the infield, ready to throw to another base.
- 10) The sweep tag is a secondary tag. It is used when the throw is late or off line and the catcher has no time to move his feet into the normal plate blocking position.

This sequence of movements is the same for catchers who are 8 or 18 years of age. It is both effective and safe. Catchers are able to concentrate on receiving throws from any part of the diamond, and then quickly react to thwart a runner's advance to home base.

leaping lizards

to build leg strength and to pop up quickly,
first squat down in catcher's position, next
you jump up as high as you can, continue to do
this to build up your leg strength and help in
stopping high pitches.
do this every night about 30 times to help your leg
strength.

WILD SIDE

The catcher holds something big in his glove like a foot ball and blocks the plate. Have a runner try to get to the plate.

The point of this exercise is to hold on to the ball and not drop it if he hits you over even.

also another drill is to sit at the plate, dive left get back in position then dive right. This will practice catching wild pitches. DO this CONTINUALLY so the wild pitches won't get by to much anymore

Catching Drill While Sitting Around the House

The exchange from the glove to the throwing hand is an important part of catching. While sitting around the house the player can sit with his glove and continuously grab the ball out of the glove making sure to grab the ball with the four seam grip. Keep the glove facing up-facing the player while exchanging to the throwing hand.

