

## Softball – infield positions – playing catcher

- Catcher is maybe the most demanding position. Especially on a hot day, don't hesitate to ask the umpire for a time out if you need a break to rest for two minutes and get some water.
- Starting position is generally squatting at the end of the batters box area behind home plate. Feet should be a bit wider than your hips, so you can move side to side if you need to. If the batter is more to the front of the batters box, then you will move up slightly. If the batter is more to the back of the batters box, you will move back slightly. Be on the balls of your feet, ready to move in any direction.
- You want to be close enough to the batter to give your pitcher a good strike-zone glove target. But you don't want to be so close that you risk getting hit with a bat because a) it hurts and b) the batter then gets a free walk to first base.
- Give your pitcher a target with your glove in the strike zone. Adjust this target, depending on the speed of your pitcher and what the umpire's strike zone is (e.g. if the umpire likes low pitches—knees to below-chest zone, then have your glove target just above the batter's knees. If your pitcher throws slow with more of an arch, you will want a low target because their balls will be dropping into the strike zone.
- Try to frame the pitches, if it is border-line in the strike zone; shift your glove slightly or fold the glove in toward the strike zone a split second after you catch it. Don't try to frame obvious balls way outside the strike zone.
- Keep your throwing hand behind you, so you don't get your bare hand hit with a foul ball.
- On bad pitches that are way out of the strike zone, try to anticipate where the ball is going, while it is still in the air in front of you. Be ready to block dirt balls by getting on your knees and getting your glove down in the dirt. Be ready to shift your body to the left or right by taking a small step to the side with each foot. Use your pads to block any balls you can.
- Area of coverage is the area in front of you, about halfway between you and the pitcher, including maybe the first 1/3 of the baselines to 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>; this includes short hits and bunts. Also, the area behind you to the backstop fence; foul balls, wild pitches, passed balls.
- When the ball is hit and its hit out of your zone, you are watching the ball / play develop but you are only worrying about covering home plate if there is a runner at 3<sup>rd</sup> or advancing past 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- On a force play to home, when the bases are loaded, step up to home plate and have your heel on the front part of home plate, so you stay out of harm's way of the runner coming in and give your infielders an easier throw to you.
- When there is a play at home that is not a force play, you will need to tag the runner. Be ready to tag low, as they will likely be sliding. Step up to be in front of home plate and be in position to tag the runner before they can slide in.
- On a foul ball pop-up that may be catchable; throw off your catcher's helmet and find the ball in the air.
- If you catch a foul-tip that would otherwise be strike 3, then that is an out.
- On a passed ball, where the runners can advance (including ball 4 – walk situation), get to the ball quickly and get it to the pitcher or possibly a base, depending on the situation.
- On a passed ball where a runner is stealing home from 3<sup>rd</sup> base, get to the ball in a body position where you can ideally make a quick low underhand toss to the pitcher, who will be covering home plate in that situation.
- If there is a runner at 1<sup>st</sup> and the ball is not hit, be ready to make a throw to 2<sup>nd</sup> base to try to throw out a runner stealing from 1<sup>st</sup>. Your target is just in front of 2<sup>nd</sup> base, where your shortstop can catch

and be in perfect position to make the tag. If the ball needs to skip in the dirt to get there quickly, that's fine. Take one or two quick steps (depending on your position when you catch the ball) and make the throw.

- If there is a runner at 2<sup>nd</sup> and the ball is not hit, be ready to throw to 3<sup>rd</sup> base on the steal. Your target is just in front of 3<sup>rd</sup> base where the 3<sup>rd</sup> base person can field it and be in perfect position to make the tag on the runner.
- If there is a runner at 3<sup>rd</sup> and the ball is not hit and that runner is taking a big lead, be ready to throw to 3<sup>rd</sup> base to pick off the runner. Take one or two quick steps to get past the batter and near home plate.
  - If the runner is close to half-way home, you will need to chase them back toward 3<sup>rd</sup> or otherwise they will easily steal home if you make the throw to 3<sup>rd</sup> right away. Once you chase them and make them commit back toward 3<sup>rd</sup>, then make the throw to 3<sup>rd</sup>. Your 3<sup>rd</sup> base person should be giving you an easy throwing lane. You will then hopefully have a teammate (pitcher or 1<sup>st</sup>) backing you up at home, so you can let them field a throw back to home, if needed.
  - If the runner is more like ¼ of the way from 3<sup>rd</sup> to home, you can throw right away. Be ready for a throw back from 3<sup>rd</sup> by staying in front of the 3<sup>rd</sup> base-home plate base line to give your teammate a clear target and be ready to catch the ball, then tag the runner coming in.
- For 12u and 18u, be ready for the 3<sup>rd</sup> strike drop rule. On strike 3, if the ball hits the ground, the batter is not out yet, if there are 2 outs or if less than 2 outs and no runner on 1<sup>st</sup> base. In this situation, tag the batter or throw to 1<sup>st</sup> base to get the batter out. If a 3<sup>rd</sup> strike drop situation happens with the bases loaded, then just step on home plate and get the force out at home.
- Know the situation in the game and where the ideal play is before the ball is hit. If the bases are loaded and less than two outs in a close game, your coach may want your teammates to throw the ball home, so be ready to step up on a hit and cover home plate.
- Practice catching and throwing with your mask on, so you get used to it.
- Before the inning actually starts and the pitcher is doing warm-up pitches; before the last warm up pitch, the catcher yells "balls in, coming down". That is the signal for the rest of the team to throw in their warm up balls. The shortstop and 2<sup>nd</sup> base cover 2<sup>nd</sup> on a simulated steal and the catcher catches the last warm-up pitch and throws it down to 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- Catchers should ideally be in their pads and ready to go by the time their team has finished batting in the previous ½ inning. Know when you will be playing catcher and be ready to get in your pads while your team is batting in the prior ½ inning. If you know you won't get a chance to hit before 3 outs or the max run limit, then get dressed out in the gear. If you are on base, the coach may substitute a runner for you with 2 outs, so you can get your gear on.

1-minute video; setup

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7mdiUFE0PE>

2-minute video; receiving a pitch / framing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg19k4g8SF8>

2 minute video; blocking:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8xn1bky9ic>