

Catching - Skill Outline

Equipment

Good equipment is a must for every catcher. Equipment must fit properly both to prevent injuries and to allow players to reach their potential. Coaches should make regular equipment checks and replace or repair faulty gear immediately.

- Mask, helmet and throat protector should fit snugly, but be loose enough to be removed quickly.
- Chest protector should be comfortable and well-fitted, especially around the neck.
- Shin guards must provide full coverage of the feet, shins and knees. You should look for extra padding over the side of the legs and top of the knees.
- Athletic supporter and cup should be worn by all players.
- Shin guards should be fastened with buckles on the outside of legs.
- Glove should be of an appropriate size and comfortable on the hand. Be sure to break the glove in adequately. The hinged glove provides added support for the thumb.

Stance

Three stances are used in catching:

1. Signal stance. **(Fig. 1)**
2. Receiving stance. **(Fig. 2)**
3. Stance used with runners on base or two strikes on the batter. **(Fig. 3)**

**At the early stages of an athletes introduction to catching, we recommend concentrating on the receiving stance.



Receiving Stance (Fig. 4-5)

The receiving stance is used when there are no runners on base and there are fewer than two strikes on the batter. This position should be comfortable and easy on the legs. The following are some key teaching points:

Body

- The catcher should establish a position as close to the plate as possible without interfering with the hitter's swing. As a general guideline, the catcher should be approximately one arms length behind the hitters' back hip. During set up, the catcher can confirm this position by touching the hitters' back hip with his/her glove.
- Body should be directly behind the plate and square to the pitcher.
- Feet shoulder width apart and even with each other.
- Make sure weight is evenly distributed and on the balls (inside) of the feet.
- Back should be straight and thighs parallel to the ground.

Glove

- Extend glove hand comfortably toward the pitcher, with your arm slightly bent.
- Hold glove hand at a slight angle, with the face of the glove exposed to the pitcher (fingers of glove hand should be slightly angled towards first base – relaxed fingers).
- Position glove hand behind the middle of the plate, level with the batters' knees.

Throwing Hand

- Protect throwing hand by keeping it behind your throwing leg calf.
- Hold your hand in a loose fist.



Receiving The Pitch

- Catch the ball with arm comfortably extended and fingers relaxed (slight bend at the elbow).
- “Give” slightly with the catch (relax your fingers).
- Watch the ball all the way into the glove
- If the ball is above your waist, catch it with your fingers pointing up.
- If the ball is below your waist, catch it with your fingers pointing down.
- Stay low and limit body movement, so that you do not obstruct the umpire’s view.
- Try not to blink when the batter swings at a pitch.

Key Points

- Balanced position.
- Relaxed receiving hand.
- Eyes on the ball.

Blocking Low Pitches (Fig. 6-8)

One of the attributes of a good catcher is his/her ability to block the pitch in the dirt. Many games have been won or lost on this skill or lack of it. Catchers must remember that they are trying to block this type of ball and not catch it. Key teaching points are:

- Drop to both knees with your body square to the ball.
- Keep your hips up and bottom down.
- Place both hands between your knees in contact with the ground.
- For safety, relax your bare hand, with palm forward and thumb at the side of the hand. Avoid fingers pointing forward.
- Have both arms slightly bent and pulled in to the side of the body.
- Keep your chin down and tucked into your chest.
- Cup your body forward to keep the ball in front. Be sure to relax your body (exhale).
- Keep your eyes open and on the ball.
- After blocking the ball, be prepared to make a play on an advancing runner.

Key Points

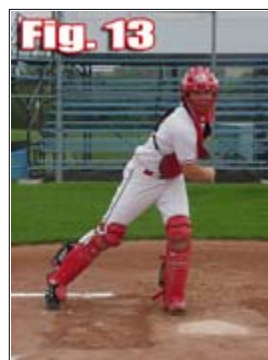
- Block, do not catch.
- Body square to the ball.
- Stay down.
- Eyes open.
- Relax body (exhale).
- Recover the ball and be prepared to make a play on an advancing runner.



Throwing

Young catchers may initially lack the arm strength to throw out runners, but with practice and proper technique, they will soon experience success. Concentrate on proper footwork, prior to emphasizing quickness and accuracy of the throw. The location of the pitch will dictate the type of footwork to be used.

1. Ball In Middle of Plate – Catch the ball and replace your stride foot heel with your pivot foot heel, point lead shoulder to target, step and throw the ball, keeping your elbow higher than your shoulder and fingers on top of the ball. (Fig. 9-13)



2. Ball To The Right – Step with your pivot foot, catch the ball, pivot, point lead shoulder to target, step with your stride foot and throw the ball, keeping your elbow higher than your shoulder and fingers on top of the ball. (Fig. 14-15)



3. Ball To The Left – Step with your stride foot, catch the ball, replace your stride foot heel with your pivot foot heel, point lead shoulder to target and throw the ball, keeping your elbow higher than your shoulder and fingers on top of the ball. (Fig. 16-17)



Key Points

- Teaching progression from slow and balanced footwork to quick and balanced footwork.
- Point lead shoulder to target, prior to releasing ball.
- Complete pivot with feet parallel and in line with the target.
- Quickness.
- Accuracy.
- Overhand throw.

Catching Pop-Ups (Fig. 18-22)

Catching pop-ups is one of the most difficult skills for a young catcher to master. Knowing the proper technique and learning how to judge a ball's drift are two essential elements in catching pop-ups.

Key Points

- Do not blink when the batter swings.
- When you know where the ball is, take off your mask and hold it.
- Turn your back to the infield.
- Move to the general area of the ball, toss your mask in the opposite direction of the ball and plate.
- Stay balanced.
- Catch the ball with both hands at about eye level.

