

**A SKILL AND**

**A DRILL**



**BASEBALL EXCELLENCE**

# A SKILL AND A DRILL

By Baseball Excellence with Tim Hopkins (THop)

There are two hundred skills listed in this document. They are offensive, defensive and mental skills that must be mastered in order to play baseball at a proficient level. The following tables present a Skill; briefly explain the correct approach, if applicable cite common mistakes and cross-reference drill(s) from the Coaches Practice Planner and other resources that will help reinforce correct technique. If the drill is covered in the Planner, the page number where the drills are located will be given. Some techniques and explanations are accessible through our videos or past Tips of the Week. They will be designated by:

V#108 Pitching Mechanics- Teaching the Delivery  
 V#110 The Complete Baseball Practice  
 V#112 Catching Skills and Drills  
 V#114 Youth Skills and Special Drills  
 V#116 The Game Within the Game  
 V#120 Youth Hitting Primer

Practice Planner PL Pg...  
 Game Day Coach GD Pg...

Past Tips of the week TOTW

Much of this material is also covered in more detail in the Baseball Excellence Newsletters.

It should be noted that many important teaching opportunities come from game situations and game failures. A coach should take advantage of these situations and teach during games. It is important for the coach to teach during practices as well. Skills should be corrected or emphasized during intra-squad games and practices. In fact, much of practice is not simply drills. It is the coach **teaching** skills.

There is no question baseball is the most difficult game to learn and to play well. An important attribute for any coach is patience. Many skills will take time, even years. Don't give up and don't give in. Constantly make sure that each player understands what the skill is, how to do it, and why he should do it a certain way, **regardless of the end result of the play.**

I think one of the most valuable benefits of this Coaching Document is the recognition of mistakes. They are mistakes we see time and again on youth and high school baseball fields. If coaches will learn how to recognize the various skills when they are performed correctly and learn what incorrect approaches look like, he will become a better coach and his players will gradually make great strides in terms of improvement.

## THE OUTFIELD

The Skill	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resource
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Routine ground ball and throw into second base.</li> </ul>	Field the ball as an infielder, keeping the ball in front of you.	Doesn't have a wide base. Doesn't get the glove down in time. Doesn't open the glove	Pre-Game Outfield Outfield Fungos  Game repetitions	GD Pg 10 PL Pg 25 V# 110
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ground ball you must cut off to prevent the runner from advancing.</li> </ul>	"Round" the ball as you approach it so you may get your body in position to throw.	Takes a direct route to the ball, not getting the body in a position to throw quickly.	9-Skill Throwing to Bases Drill  Pre-game Outfield	PL Pg 22 V# 110  GD Pg 10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fielding a ground ball on the run and throw to a base.</li> </ul>	Field the ball outside your glove-side foot and keep your feet moving, come up and throw.	Fields the ball in front of body. Stops moving feet. Does not charge ball. Too many steps.	9-Skill Throwing to Bases Drill Pre-game Outfield	PL Pg 22 V# 110 GD Pg 10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Catching a routine fly ball.</li> </ul>	Get to the fly ball as soon as possible. Avoid drifting or timing the ball. Catch with both hands when possible. Catch ball on throwing side.	Drifts to the ball. Doesn't catch ball on correct side of body.	Outfield fungos  Batting Practice  Game Reps	PL Pg 25,  34
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fly ball with runner(s) on base and/or trying to throw a runner out.</li> </ul>	Get to the ball as fast as possible but stay behind the ball so you can catch it on the run in the direction the throw is to be made.	Camps under the ball and doesn't allow his momentum to help with the throw.	Outfield fungos  Batting Practice  Game Reps	PL Pg 25,  34
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tracking fly balls</li> <li>Read the ball off the bat</li> </ul>	Go directly to the spot where the ball will land.	Takes a poor route to the ball. Goes straight across and then back.	Batting Practice Quarterbacks Outfield Fungos	PL Pg 34, 27, 25
	Get an early break on the ball by concentrating on the hitter's swing and the strike zone.	Doesn't break until the swing is completed. Poor concentration skills.	Batting Practice Outfield Fungos  Game Reps	PL Pg 34, 25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hit the cutoff man (Throwing "through" the cutoff)</li> </ul>	Make an accurate line drive throw "through" the cutoff man, head high.	Overthrows the cutoff man. Throws with too much arc on the ball. Throws only hard enough to reach the cutoff.	Relay Race 9-Skill Throwing to Bases Drill  Pre-Game Outfield	PL Pg 29, 22,  V#110 GD Pg 10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Laying out" for a ball</li> </ul>	Dive for a ball he couldn't reach any other way. (Elbows out to avoid jarring.)	Hesitates, doesn't lay out. Fear issues.	Lay out Drill	PL Pg 44 V#110
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicate with outfielders-infielders without taking eyes off fly balls</li> </ul>	Understand priorities. Communicate with fielder while keeping eyes on ball.	Looks at fielder, loses sight of ball.	Outfield Priorities	PL Pg 24  V# 110

## THE OUTFIELD

The Skill	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use good running technique while tracking fly balls</li> </ul>	Run on balls of feet, put glove up on <b>last 3 steps</b> only.	Does not run on balls of feet, ball will look like it is “bouncing.” Runs with glove up.	Form Running Outfield Fungos Quarterbacks	Planner Pg 5, 22, 27 V#110
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Throw accurately and on a line</li> </ul>	Keep elbow shoulder-high; release ball out front and pull down on ball. Use a 4-seam grip.	Low elbow, releases ball too early, too much arc on ball. Doesn't “pull down” on the ball.	Long Toss Teach Throwing All Outfield Drills Pre-game Relay Race	PL Pg 5, 11,  GD Pg 10 29
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Backing up bases</li> </ul>	A base should be backed up on every play. Sometimes more than one base per play.	Lack of concentration, lack of knowledge, coaches give in.	Skull sessions Game Teaching Don't waste too much practice time-use rain days.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Going back on a fly ball.</li> </ul>	React to ball off bat, drop step to ball side, turn and track ball to spot where it will land. Know where the fence is before pitch.	Reacts late, doesn't get a good read on ball, comes in and then goes back. Lack of concentration.	Outfield Fungos Batting Practice Quarterbacks  Game Teaching	PL Pg 25, 34, 22
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comes in on ball.</li> </ul>	Concentrate on contact zone, read ball off bat and react quickly. Don't pull up and let ball fall in.	Reacts late, doesn't get a good read on ball. Pulls up, is tentative.	Outfield Fungos  Batting Practice  Game Teaching	PL Pg 25,  34
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shading hitters:</li> </ul>	Coach moves outfielders before pitch. Shade according to pull side of hitter. (LH or RH) Shade 4-5 steps only.	Coach does not move outfielders.  <b>The game is played one pitch at a time.</b>	Batting Practice  Game Teaching	PL Pg 34

### TIPS:

- Never drift to a fly ball.
- The first three steps are important to being a good outfielder. “Get there.”
- Run hard and try to catch every ball standing still. (Helps break the habit of drifting.)
- Catch fly balls above the eyes. Once the ball passes below the eyes it is harder to follow into the glove.
- Communicate with the other outfielders and infielders.
- Learn to run to the point where the ball will come down. Don't go straight across and then in or back.
- If you turn the wrong way going back on a ball, don't turn back toward the ball to make an adjustment. Turn your back on the ball and without breaking stride make the adjustment and pick the ball up again. (Quarterback drill is vital to teach this skill.)
- Use your voice loud and clear.
- On tandem relays (double cut) make sure you hit the first relay man.
- Make sure you pay attention to catcher signs; (throw downs, type of pitch, etc).

**Practice Outfield fungos daily.**

## PITCHING

The Skill	Drills	Resources
<p><b>THROWING A BULLPEN-</b> Although throwing a bullpen is not a “Game Skill”, it is so important to pitching that we include it here. It is significant that the pitcher create a routine that he uses the same way every time, practice or game. This “performance program” is extremely beneficial in developing pitch command. This is the routine we have used for years. The pitcher does not begin throwing at full velocity; in fact, he does not reach 100% until the last 10 or so pitches. He begins at 50-75% velocity, conducting a mental overview of his mechanics, finding his release point and getting good rotation on the ball.</p> <p>The catcher counts the pitches.</p> <p>*See “<b>Throwing a Bullpen</b>” on page 42</p>	<p>After the <b>Stretch, Form Run and Throw</b> routine, the pitcher takes the mound and makes several medium-velocity throws to the catcher who is standing behind the plate. (If it is Game Day, he begins 20 minutes before he will take the mound.)</p> <p>The catcher sets up <b>1 foot off</b> the right side of the plate-pitcher throws <b>4</b> fastballs; catcher sets up <b>1 foot off</b> the left side of the plate- pitcher throws <b>4</b> fastballs; catcher sets up on the inside corner-<b>4</b> fastballs; outside corner- <b>4</b> fastballs. This starts the pitcher with <b>16</b> fastballs, helping him spot it by concentrating on hitting the glove. Next, the catcher stands up and the pitcher works only on getting good spin on his curve ball, 4-5 nice and easy tosses concentrating on spin. Then the catcher sets up on the middle of the late and the pitcher delivers 5 curve balls. Next, the pitcher throws 5-8 change ups down the middle, concentrating on arm speed. That is 26-30 pitches at less than 100 % velocity. The last 10-20 pitches are at full velocity, the pitcher mixes them up and the catcher moves around on the plate. <b>Throw ½of all pens from the stretch.</b></p>	<p>Planner Pg 17, 5</p> <p>TOTW</p>
<p><b>PITCHERS FIELDING PRACTICE</b> We’ll list the Skills here and the accompanying drills are part of PFP. Teach your pitchers to field their position.</p>	<p>PFP is a good time for pitchers to work on fastball command, along with pitching from the stretch. Each pitcher has a ball and they line up behind the third base side of the mound. Catchers also work on their game. Pitchers can use this in lieu of a bullpen.</p>	<p>PL Pg 18</p> <p>V#110</p> <p>PFP</p>
<p><b>COMEBACKERS</b> (runner on first base)</p>	<p>From the stretch pitcher delivers a fastball strike. Coach hits a ground ball directly at him. Pitcher makes a drop step with his glove-side foot so that his shoulder is closed to second base. He fields the ball, takes a step and throws chest-high over the second base bag to begin the double play.</p>	<p>PL Pg 18</p> <p>V#110</p> <p>PFP</p>
<p><b>PITCHERS COVERING FIRST BASE</b></p>	<p>Pitcher delivers a fastball strike. Coach hits a ground ball to the first baseman. Pitcher sprints directly to the bag and on the run, receives an underhand toss from the infielder. He should break down to receive the throw, step on the inside half of the bag, then continue back into fair territory to avoid contact with the runner. Both first and second basemen should be involved in the drill.</p>	<p>PL Pg 18</p> <p>V#110</p> <p>PFP</p>

## PITCHING

<b>BUNTS ALONG FIRST BASE LINE-</b>	Pitchers sprints (under control) directly to the ball. Gets chest over ball and if the ball has stopped rolling, “pushes” ball into ground before picking up. Sets feet (keeps feet moving) and throws to first base. Don’t put ball back in glove.	PL Pg 18 V#110 PFP
<b>BUNTS ALONG THIRD BASE LINE-</b>	Pitcher sprints (under control) directly to the ball with back facing first base. Gets chest over ball and “pushes” ball into ground before picking up, drop steps with his left foot and throws. (RH)	PFP PL Pg 18
<b>DO OR DIE - SQUEEZE BUNT (WINNING RUN)</b>	This is the winning run in the bottom of the last inning. Pitcher sprints to the ball and in one motion, scoops up ball with glove and underhand tosses to the catcher. This is done without the throwing hand touching the ball. (Practice this one time.)	
<b>BACKING UP BASES</b>	With a runner on first and a single to the outfield or double and no one on base, backs up third base. With a runner on second and a single to the outfield backs up home.	GD Pg 32-39
<b>PICKOFFS</b>	RH-develop “jump-spin” move. LH- Develop ability to control your body from the balance point and learn correct angle to first base.	PFP-PL Pg 18, 28 V# 116
Understanding the pitching <b>delivery</b> and how it works is an important step in a pitcher’s development. Pitchers must learn to coach themselves on the mound. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arm action</li> <li>• Balance</li> <li>• Direction</li> <li>• Release</li> <li>• Extension</li> <li>• Follow-through</li> </ul>	Drills to improve. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long toss. Work on throwing mechanics.</li> <li>• Batting Practice- throwing from the outfield</li> <li>• 2x4 drill</li> <li>• Towel Drill</li> <li>• 1,2,3 Drill</li> <li>• Bullpens</li> <li>• Mirror drills</li> <li>• Shadow pitching (Without ball)</li> <li>• Pitchers Fielding Practice</li> <li>• Throw change ups from outfield during BP.</li> <li>• Game coaching opportunities</li> </ul>	PL Pg 15,18  V#108 V#110

It is important to develop a **Pitching Philosophy**- a plan if you will. Your pitching staff should be aware of what you want to accomplish and how you want to go about it. Here are a few suggestions:

- Keep a **positive** mound demeanor. Never let ‘em see you sweat. Think, “I got it, here it is, here it comes.”
- The most potent weapon for any pitcher is his fastball. He must develop **fastball command**. To develop it he must throw it.
- Get **strike one**. Strike one is the best pitch in baseball.
- **Work fast**. This keeps the defense on its toes.
- **Make** the hitters hit the ball. Don’t be afraid to throw the ball over the plate.
- Hit the **glove**. That is always the pitcher’s target.
- Pitch **inside**.
- “0-2 **Smart**.” Don’t give up a hit on any 0-2 count.
- You came to pitch. Don’t pitch and try to umpire too. Learn the umpire’s strike zone.
- Think of the change as a “contact pitch”, not a strikeout pitch.
- **Refocus** when you have two outs. Many a big inning has started with two outs. “Close the deal.”
- Use your breaking pitch **sparingly**. Too many curve balls will “shorten up” your fastball.
- When you take the mound after your team has just scored, **shut the other team down**.
- Focus on getting **the first out** of every inning.
- Coach helps pitchers develop **mental toughness**.

## GENERAL INFIELD PLAY

The Skill	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
Field routine ground balls	Wide base. Keep body and glove low and out front. Field from “ground up”. Move into the ball. Field ball in middle of body. Keep hands off knees. Head down. Keep feet moving.	Narrow base. Gets down too late. Fields ball from a standing still position. Doesn’t get head down. (Look for brim on cap to be pointing down.) Glove not open. Backs up. Fields ball to side of body.	Infield fungos Batting Practice Game Teaching “Count the hops”	PL Pg 25, 26 34 V# 110 TOTW
Field ground balls to his left	Keep body and glove low. Keep feet moving through the ball. Moves on balls of feet.	Runs standing up. Gets glove down too late. Doesn’t move through the ball; stops. (This is athletic play and helps define infielders.)	Infield fungos Batting Practice Game Teaching	PL Pg 25, 26, 34 V#110 TOTW
Backhand ground balls	Get glove out away from body to allow soft hands. Bring ball in toward foot. The action is in and up. Catch ball in web of glove. Keep glove low.	Glove too close to foot. Glove not low. Hard hands. Ball bounces out. Too much wrist action. This should be practiced until it becomes a routine play.	Infield fungos Batting Practice Game Teaching	PL Pg 25, 26, 34 V#110 TOTW
Field slow rollers	Ball is caught with glove out in front of left toes. Body is low and throw is made sidearm or $\frac{3}{4}$ off the right foot while body moves straight ahead.	Stops. Doesn’t move through the ball. Takes too many steps after fielding. Stands up to throw. <b>Lack of reps.</b> Should do everyday.	Infield fungos Batting Practice Game Teaching	PL Pg 25, 26, 34 V#110 TOTW
Throw a baseball correctly and with adequate arm strength.	Most infielders’ throws are high $\frac{3}{4}$ 4-seam grip, fingers on top of ball with thumb underneath.	A myriad of throwing faults. Many are outlined in the Planner. Undercoached area of the game.	Long Toss Teaching in Practices Game Teaching	PL Pg 5, 11, 12 V# 114 TOTW
Make an underhand shovel toss- Necessary for some DP’s and first baseman’s toss to pitcher covering first base.	Firm wrist. Stay low. “Show” ball (get ball out of glove). Walk behind the ball through release.	Stands up at release-ball sails. Doesn’t get ball out of glove quickly- (hides ball.) Doesn’t walk behind ball.	Teaching in Practices Game Teaching	PL Pg 18 TOTW V#110 V# 114

## GENERAL INFIELD PLAY

The Skills	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
Execute proper techniques on relays and cutoffs	<p><b>Cutoffs</b>-Get to spot quickly. Set up about 60 feet from home or base. Line up. Raise hands, move feet as ball is in the air.</p> <p><b>Relays</b>- Set up on edge of outfield grass on routine plays. Go into outfield when outfielder turns his back. Know double cuts.</p>	<p>Drifts to location. Doesn't line up. Sets up too far away from home plate.</p> <p>Goes too far into outfield on routine plays. Doesn't line up correctly.</p>	<p>Relay Race</p> <p>Pre-Game Drill</p> <p>Teaching in Practices</p> <p>Game Teaching</p>	<p>PL Pg 29 V# 110</p> <p>GD Pg 10</p>
Learn "set" and "ready" positions and use them at the proper time	<p><b>Set</b>- in athletic position with knees bent and analyzes all situations.</p> <p><b>Ready</b>- assumes position <b>as ball is released</b>. Knees bent more, glove lowered. More on balls of feet with weight forward. Thinks, "I want ball hit to me."</p>	<p>Not taught by coach. Loses concentration. Stands up when ball is released. Back on heels. Gets in ready position <b>too early</b>.</p>	<p>Teaching in Practices</p> <p>Game Teaching</p>	TOTW
Understand the importance of communication with teammates. Know fly ball priorities.	<p>Communicate- number of outs. Runners advancing. Fly balls.</p>	<p>Doesn't talk. Doesn't understand game-coach doesn't give enough information.</p>	<p>Teaching in Practices</p> <p>Fly ball Priorities</p> <p>Game Teaching</p>	<p>PL Pg 24 V# 110</p>
Technique for making tags.	<p>Get fanny as low as possible, tag firmly, and show the umpire your glove on the way up. Do not sweep tag.</p>	<p>Too tall. Sweep tags. Doesn't put glove side to runner and exposes ball.</p>	<p>Teaching in Practices</p> <p>Pre-game</p>	<p>PL Pg 22 V# 110</p> <p>GD Pg 10</p>
Forehand and backhand picks on throws from other fielders.	<p>Fearless. Concentrates on ball as it arrives. Keeps body in front of throw. Glove down and picks ball on way up.</p>	<p>Lets ball go by. Turns head. "Hard" hands.</p>	<p>9-Skill drill</p> <p>Short hop drill.</p>	<p>PL Pg 22</p> <p>GD Pg 10</p>

### Tips:

- Keep feet moving as you field the ball.
- Move toward the ball. Don't let it play you.
- Stay low and don't stand up as you approach the ball.
- "Walk behind" the ball after release on throws to first base.
- On fly balls into the outfield, go as hard as you can and stop only when called off by the outfielder.
- Always throw with a 4-seam grip.
- Practice the backhand until it becomes a routine play.
- Always expect a bad throw.
- **Take infield fungos every day.**

## FIRST BASE PLAY

The Skill	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
Move to the base and set up correctly	Get there quickly. It's harder for the infielder to make a good throw if he has to wait. Set up with both feet on corners in front of bag.	Gets there late. Sets up with foot on bag too early. This cuts down on his ability to move to the ball.	Teaching in Practices Pre-game Drill Game Teaching	GD Pg 10 V# 114 TOTW
Use proper footwork around the bag	Set up with throwing-hand foot on bag. Stretch when ball is in flight; not before. May use "dance step" on balls left or right.	Sets up too early. Uses wrong foot. Makes stretch too early and cannot recover on a poor throw. Not athletic around bag.	Teaching in Practices Pre-game Drill Game Teaching	V# 114 GD Pg10 TOTW
Provide a target for the infielder  Provide a target for the catcher	Face throw with body open to infielder.  Face catcher with left foot on side of bag and body facing catcher.	Sets up with one foot on bag too early and closes off body to thrower.  Doesn't present a full-face to the catcher.	Teaching in Practices  Pre-game Drill	V# 114 GD Pg 10 TOTW
Catches ball correctly.  Make "picking" bad throws in the dirt a routine play.	Catch all balls one-handed. This allows a longer reach. Don't stretch out too far. Don't flatten your glove, keep glove open with fingers pointing down and stay low.	Doesn't open glove. Tries to catch with two hands.  Fear of ball; turns head. Stretches too far and too early.	Teaching in practices  Extra time after or before practice. Throw <b>hundreds</b> of balls in the dirt.	TOTW  V#114 PL Pg 44
Make an accurate throw to all bases	4-seam grip. Elbow shoulder-high. Shoulder closed to target. Feet moving.	Various Throwing faults. 2-seam grip-makes ball tail and doesn't carry as well.	Long Toss  Pre-game Drill Teaching in Practices Game teaching	PL Pg 5 GD Pg 10
Set up to hold a runner on	Right foot against infield side of bag, left foot parallel and in front of foul line. Athletic position with glove knee-high and open.	All sorts of ways. Straddling bag, wrong side of bag, standing straight up, etc.	Pre-game Drill  Teaching in Practices  Game Teaching	GD Pg 10  V#116
Make tags on throws from catcher or pitchers	Get fanny as low as possible, make firm tag, show your glove to the umpire. Do not	Sweeps glove. Lets runner divide his attention. Does not get low.	Teaching in Practices  Game Teaching	
Make underhand shovel toss to pitcher breaking to first.	Firm wrist. Stay low. "Show" ball (get ball out of glove). Walk behind the ball through release.	Stands up at release-ball sails. Doesn't get ball out of glove quickly. Doesn't walk behind ball.	PFP	PL Pg 18  V# 110

## FIRST BASE PLAY

The Skills	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
Correct footwork for the double play throw to second	RH- if moving to the right backhand the ball to make the throw. Throw to the outfield side of second base. Get back quickly to take the return throw.	Tries to throw over the runner. Slow feet.	Teaching in Practices Pre-game	GD Pg 10 V# 114 TOTW
Know when to charge in preparation to field bunted balls.	“Read” the barrel of the bat off the hitter’s shoulder. (As soon as the barrel comes off the first baseman moves in.)	Reacts late. Waits for batter to show bunt. Charges out of control.	Skull Sessions on rain days Teaching in Practices	TOTW V# 116
Field bunts with proper footwork and make accurate throws	Banana route to the ball to square shoulder to first base. If ball is rolling, field with two hands. If it is stopped, push it into the ground. Chest over ball. Listen to the catcher for directions.	Runs straight to the ball and then turns body. Runs out of control. Fumbles ball. Doesn’t set feet. Attention is divided on ball and runner.	Teaching in Practices PFP	V# 116 PL Pg 18
Become the cutoff man on throws from center and right fields	Hustles to line up between outfielder and home. Sets up about 60’ from home plate. Keeps hand in the air to provide a target.	Slow reacting. Sets up too far from home plate. Doesn’t line up properly.	Teaching in Practices Skull Sessions. Pre-game Relay race	GD Pg 10 PL Pg 29 V#110
Be able to execute a rundown	Takes throw from pitcher, runs hard at base runner. Does not throw until the off infielder has closed so that one throw will retire the runner.	Indecisive. Throws over runner. Throws too early and creates a multiple-throw situation.	Rundowns off pickoffs in practice Game Teaching	PL Pg 28 V# 110
Trail the runner to second on double cut defense  Watch to see if runner tags base on extra base hit.	When middle infielders go out on double cuts, first baseman trails runner to second and is in position to take throw if base runner is too aggressive.	Doesn’t trail runner-not taught.	Pre-game Teaching in Practices	GD Pg 10
Good defensive positioning***	Don’t set up too close to bag and/or too shallow.  Let game situations dictate positioning.	Coach fails to teach. Coach fails to move fielders in game to cover various defensive situations.	Skull session on rain days Teaching in Practices Game teaching	PL Pg 19 GD Pg 25

## MIDDLE INFIELD PLAY

The Skill	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
Field and make the throw, (routine ground ball <b>at</b> the infielder) to the pivot man on double plays	<b>SS</b> -drop left foot to open hips to the bag. Field ground ball and in one smooth motion make a $\frac{3}{4}$ throw chest high to the pivot man. Elbow up. <b>2<sup>nd</sup> baseman</b> - drop right foot to open hips.	Too much movement. Not smooth. Does not drop step. Makes “low elbow” throw. Not 4-seam grip.	Practices Batting Practice Pre-game Game Teaching	V# 114 PL Pg 34 GD Pg 10 TOTW
Field and make the throw (ground ball <b>toward</b> second base) to the pivot on double plays.	<b>SS</b> - Keep feet moving, makes underhand shovel toss to the second baseman. <b>2nd baseman</b> - Makes shovel toss the SS	Stands up on shovel toss and ball sails. Doesn't keep feet moving toward the bag. Doesn't “show” ball to the pivot man.	Practices Batting Practice Pre-game	PL Pg 34 GD Pg 10 V# 114
Execute footwork at pivot on double plays  Take throws on double play.	<b>SS</b> - Step next to back of bag with right foot, steps toward ball with left foot, take throw (hands together) drag foot across the bag square shoulders and throw to first. <b>2<sup>nd</sup></b> - Step on bag with left foot, step toward throw with right, plant and throw.	Hands too far apart. Inhibits quick release. Crow hops to make throw. Steps back in path of base runner. Faulty footwork. Doesn't hustle to the bag, tries to time the throw.	Practices Batting Practice Pre-game Game Teaching	PL PG 34 GD Pg 10 V# 114
Take throws and make tags from the catcher on steals.	Get there quickly to present a target for catcher. Straddle back of the bag. Lay glove with ball on dirt to let runner tag himself out. Off infielder backs up play.	Lazy to the position. Sets up in front of bag. Catches ball and reaches for runner instead of dropping glove. Opens glove to the runner.	Practices Pre-game Game Teaching	GD Pg 10
Take throws and make tags from the outfield.	Straddle bag and faces throw. Do not let ball bounce by him. If necessary, block ball with body.	Closes body to throw. Balls in the dirt get by him. Turns head, doesn't get glove down. Afraid to block ball with body.	9-skill throwing to bases drill Pre-game Game Teaching	PL Pg 22
Become relay man on throws from the outfield.	If ball gets by outfielder ( <b>turns his back on ball</b> ) the same-side infielder sprints about 30-40 feet out on the grass to take the relay. On routine plays he positions on the edge of the outfield grass.	Doesn't sprint to line up. Does not know where to throw the ball.	Relay Race Pre-game Game Teaching	PL Pg 29

## MIDDLE INFIELD PLAY

The Skills	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
Become the trailer on double cuts on base hits deep in the gaps	The off-middle infielder trails the relay man and stops approx. 30 feet behind him to take any bad throw from the outfielder. If the relay man fields the ball, he tells him where to throw it. Communication is vital.	Does not trail play. Does not communicate.	Skull session on rain days  Teaching in Practices  Game Teaching	
Execute pick-off plays from the pitcher	SS- daylight play. Moves behind runner and shows glove in front of body. Takes glove to the bag for throw from pitcher. 2 <sup>nd</sup> baseman- Moves to bag and takes throw from pitcher.		Teaching in Practices  Timing is crucial on these plays.	V# 116
Take come-backers from the pitcher to finish the double play.	Moves quickly behind bag and presents a good target. Catches ball with both hands, moves feet and throws. Correct throwing motion with 4-seam grip.	Late to the bag, catches ball with one hand, (takes longer to get off throw), poor footwork (Doesn't set feet, too many steps, poor grip on ball)	PFP	PL Pg 18  V# 110
Be able to execute rundowns.	Run with the ball in your bare hand. Get the runner going full speed. Throw and get out of the base line. Fielder receives the throw with momentum toward the runner	Indecisive. Throws over runner. Throws too early and creates a multiple-throw situation.	Rundowns off pickoffs  Game Teaching	PL Pg 28  V# 110
Good defensive positioning.	Don't set up too far from bag and too shallow.  Let game situations dictate positioning.	Coach fails to teach. Coach fails to move fielders in game to cover various defensive situations.	Skull session on rain days  Teaching in Practices  Game teaching	PL Pg 19  GD Pg 25  V#114
Know all possible situations; backups, cover bases, pull hitters, score, inning, listens to coach for directions. Relays number of outs to the outfield			Game Teaching  Skull session on rain days	

## MIDDLE INFIELD PLAY

The Skills	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
Fielding pop ups into the outfield	Knows outfield priorities.  Communicates.  Catches ball over the head.	Tentative. Doesn't communicate with other fielders.	Quarterbacks  Outfield priorities.	PL Pg 27, 24  V# 110
Back up all throws.	Off- middle infielder backs up second on throws from catcher. Backs up throws from the outfield. Backs up throws to pitcher. Second baseman backs up behind first base.			
Yes, yes-no, no in the middle.	Middle infielders communicate with runner on first base. Before the infielder comes up with the ball; yes, yes means to throw to second for the force. No, No means to throw to first base for the out.			
Be fearless, always throw hard* (bad throws will get to back up man quicker) * Except for double play throws to the pivot.				
Middle infielder should cover 1st or 3 <sup>rd</sup> base on throws to the plate from the outfield. <b>Example:</b> Grounder between 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> base into right field. The second baseman should first attempt to field the ball. If he doesn't he should then hustle to cover 1b. This way if the first baseman cuts the ball (near the mound) he can take the throw with momentum toward 1b while the runner takes a turn toward 2b. The short stop does the same at 3b on balls to the left side.				

### Tips:

- Don't assume "ready" position too early.
- Communication with middle infielders is vital.
- MI's have a tendency to play too shallow. Stay back toward the outfield grass on most plays.
- The SS has priority over the other infielders on fly balls.
- MI's should learn how to keep runners close at second. (That does not mean etting out of position, however.

### THIRD BASE PLAY

The Skill	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
Field and make the throw to the middle infielder on double plays	Keep feet moving. Make an accurate 4-seam $\frac{3}{4}$ arm throw chest-high over the bag. Body is already closed to the bag so it is simply field and throw. Stay low, shuffle step, and throw.	Stops feet. Doesn't use a 4-seam grip. Stands up. Crow hops. Guides throw.	Batting Practice  Pre-game	PL Pg 34
Have the courage to handle hard hit ground balls	Gets low and takes bounced balls off the chest. Fearless. Great reaction time.	Fear issues. Does not get glove low to the ground. Turns body away from ball.	(Don't hit hard ground balls in practice. Develop good technique and that will breed confidence and courage.)	
Be able to throw accurately from third to first	Strong arm with good arm action. 4-seam grip. Keeps feet moving before and after the throw.	Arm action faults. No 4-seam grip. Stops feet.	Infield fungos  Long toss	PL Pg 25, 11, 5  V# 110
Be able to quickly "read" the bunt	React to the bunt as the batter takes the bat off his shoulders. Charges under control.	Reacts late. Overruns ball.	Teaching in Practices  Game teaching	TOTW  V# 116
Field bunts	3rd baseman "reads" bunt. If pitcher can field it, he returns to bag. Fields rolling bunt with two hands. Play is almost always at first base.	Reacts late. Poor throwing mechanics. Doesn't set feet. Throws to wrong base and fails to get an out.	Teaching in Practices  PFP  Game teaching	V# 116  PL Pg 18
Become the cut-off man on base hits to LF with a runner on second	It is your responsibility to set up correctly. Line up between the outfielder and home, 60 feet from the plate. Use the pitcher's rubber as a guide.	Sets up too far away from the plate. Doesn't line up. Doesn't get there in time.	Relay race  Teaching in Practices  Game teaching  Pre-Game Drill	PL Pg 29    GD Pg 10

### THIRD BASE PLAY

The Skills	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
Know all possible situations.	Demonstrates “athletic intelligence”, the ability to think on one’s feet. There comes a time when a player either does it or doesn’t.	Hesitates, doesn’t work hard at practice to develop instincts.	Skull sessions on rain days.  Game Teaching	
Make tags on throws from the infielders and catcher.	If force play, play it like a 1 <sup>st</sup> baseman.  Straddle bag on throw from catcher.	Slow to react to ball and slow to read situations. Reaches out to tag runner when all he needed was a force out.	Pre-Game Drill  Practice  Game Teaching	GD Pg 10  V# 116
Make tags on throws from the outfield.	On throws from the outfield, Face the throw, straddle bag in foul territory. Anticipate location of throw. Don’t let ball get by you.	Doesn’t move feet on bad throw. Gets glove down late.	9-Skill throwing to Bases  Pre-Game Drill  Game Teaching	PL Pg 22  GD Pg 10
Execute rundowns.	Run with the ball in your bare hand. Get the runner going full speed. Throw and get out of the base line. Fielder receives the throw with momentum toward the runner	Indecisive. Throws over runner. Throws too early and creates a multiple-throw situation.	Rundowns off pick-offs  Game Teaching	PI Pg 28  V# 110
Make the slow roller a routine play.	Take banana route to ball. Fields ball in front of left toes. Keep feet moving and make snap sidearm throw off right foot to first base.	Runs straight at ball making throw more difficult. Fields ball by side of foot, taking longer to get off throw. Stops moving feet.	Fungos  Pre-game	Planner Pg 25  V#110
Good Defensive positioning.	Plays deep and off the line. Plays even with the bag in bunt situations.	Coach fails to teach. Coach fails to move fielders in game to cover various defensive situations. Usually plays too shallow.	Skull session on rain days  Practice  Game teaching	PL Pg 19  GD Pg 25

**GENERAL INFIELD TIP: Don’t look at the runner** when throwing to a base. It will divide your attention and may cause you to rush your throw. Look only at the target presented by your teammate.

## CATCHING

The Skills	Correct Approach	Drills	Resources
Understands his job. Displays confidence in his ability.	Knows that a catcher's number one job is to make the pitcher look good.  <b>*See Catching Tutorial on page 31.</b>	Bullpens  Game Teaching	*  V# 112
Bare hand behind right ankle- no runners  Bare hand behind glove-runners on base	Catching is a one handed position like first base. Hide the bare hand from foul tips. With runners on base, place hand loosely cupped, behind the glove	Practices  Bullpens  Game Teaching	V# 112  *  
Frame borderline strikes	Stay square, catch ball and move wrist up, down, over and into the strike zone. Frame with a straight, with slight flex and not stiff front arm. Stay down and hold for one second for the umpire to see and then throw it back to the pitcher. Any longer than this is considered showing him up. Cue: receive the ball, say to yourself, " Wilson" (if Wilson glove), and throw back to the pitcher.	Practices  Bullpens  Game Teaching	V# 112  *  
Prevent balls from moving outside the strike zone (Keep a strike a strike.)	<b>*See Catching Tutorial on page 30.</b>	Practices  Bullpens  Game Teaching	V# 112  *  
Trail runner to first with no one on base	Take a direct route to that area at the fence where an overthrow will likely end up. The main objective is to keep errant throws out of the first base dugout. The second objective is to keep the runner at 1b.	Practices  Game Teaching	
Fielding bunts.	Sprint out but do not interfere with the batter/runner. Throw mask out of your and the runner's way. Scoop ball with bare hand and open mitt (at same time) as the feet are shuffling to get you out into the infield for a straight throw to 1b.	Pre-game Practices  Scatter balls along foul lines move along line and field balls.	GD Pg 10  V# 112
Set up late	Be Soft and quiet. Set up when the pitcher begins his windup. Learn rhythm and style of each pitcher on your staff.	Practices  Bullpens  Game Teaching	V# 112  *  

## CATCHING

The Skills	Correct Approach	Drills	Resources
Throwing to first- “inside” or “outside”	On bunts or dribblers in front of the plate the catcher fields the ball and yells “inside, inside” to alert the first baseman or second baseman covering the bag where to set up to receive the throw. On dropped third strikes that kick outside the foul line, the catcher yells, “outside outside” and the first baseman sets up in foul territory to take throw.	PFP Pre-game Drill	PL Pg 18 GD Pg 10
Throwing to second base	<b>*See Catching Tutorial on page 31.</b>	PFP Pre-game Practices Game Teaching	PL Pg 18 GD Pg 10 V#112
Throwing to third base	On most pitches the catcher will clear behind the (RH) hitter by shuffling his <b>right foot behind his left</b> , closing off his front side and throw. This shuffle clears him from the hitter. Only on throws that are outside of the plate when he must make the “near foot” step to his right, should he be forced to step in front of the hitter. He steps with his right foot to receive the ball, steps with his left foot in front of the plate, closes and throws.	Pre-game Drill  Teaching in Practices  Game Teaching	GD Pg 10  V#112
“Pop” time	The Major League average is 1.9. This is WITH A BATTER SWINGING DURING GAMES. The average D-1 catcher is about 2.1 and the average high school catcher is about 2.3. Your time is not as fast as you think it is and you cannot be too fast. Technique is as important as arm strength.	Pre-game Drill  In between innings  Practices	GD Pg10  V# 112
Pitch outs	RH Hitter-The catcher sets up so the outside corner of the plate cuts him in half. He should always anticipate a bad throw. As the pitcher’s arm moves toward home plate, he makes a short lateral movement with his left foot. As the ball is released he steps with the right foot toward the ball, closes his front side and throws.	Practices  Game Teaching	
Block all balls in dirt	<b>*See Catching Tutorial on page 31.</b>	Bullpens  Practices (every third block, quickly retrieve ball.)  Down-Ups Game Teaching	*  V# 112  V#114

## CATCHING

The Skills	Correct Approach	Drills	Resources
Passed balls or wild pitches.	Turn and sprint to the point the ball will end up. Slide beside the ball on your left shin guard and trap ball with open mitt and bare hand (at the same time). Plant right foot and throw off of left knee. Throws should be firm, knee high, and 1 foot up the 3B line. This allows the pitcher to get the tag down quicker.	Scatter balls along the back fence and have the catchers sprint to them from their stance.	
Foul Pop Ups	<b>*See Catching Tutorial on page 31.</b>	Practices-Coach hits high fungos with backspin. Take several pre-season sessions.  Pre-game	TOTW  V# 110  GD Pg 10
Tag Plays at home	<b>*See Catching Tutorial on page 31.</b>	Coach hits sharp fungos (from the SS position) to the catchers.  9-skill Drill Practices Pre-game	V# 110 V# 112  PL Pg 22 GD Pg 10
Receiving throws at home	Forehand and backhand picks are often necessary on throws from fielders. Get the backside as low as possible and pick the ball aggressively on the way up. Forehand picks are performed with a lot of wrist action and the backhand is performed with a locked wrist and bent elbow. ( <b>Backhand:</b> attack ball in an upward, not outward motion. <b>Forehand:</b> Pick in an upward and outward motion. )	Coach hits sharp fungos from the SS position.  Pre-game  9-skill drill	V# 110 V# 112  GD Pg 10 PL Pg 22
Decoy runner on close play at the plate	As the throw is approaching, drop your hands by your sides as if the outfielder misplayed the ball. This may cause the runner to slow.		
Appealing check swings	Politely ask the umpire if he would mind asking his partner for help. Do not raise up and point at his partner as if to ask him yourself. Never, ever show up the umpire.		
<b>Free trip to the mound:</b> (Doesn't count as a visit.)	Reasons can be to settle down a pitcher that's struggling, stall for time for a pitcher to get ready in the bull pen, discuss and make sure all infielders understand the situations and signs you are giving, plate umpire is temporarily hurt. (This is a courtesy to the umpire so he can regroup.)		

## CATCHING

The Skills	Correct Approach	Drills	Resources
Rundowns	Run with the ball in your bare hand. Get the runner going full speed. Throw, get out of the base line and keep going toward that base. Do not peel off and return. Fielder receives the throw with momentum toward the runner.	Rundowns Game Teaching	PL PG 28 V# 110
First and third situations	Call time out, stand in front of home plate and go through a series of signs for the infield that may include: Cut by MI or pitcher, straight throw to 3B. When “throwing through” always take a quick glance at the runner at 3B just before throwing to 2B. This will slow his momentum	Teaching in practices	V# 114 V# 116
Showcase your arm	Use your pre-game to show case your arm. Scouts don’t care much about errant throws and many leave when it’s over.		
Communicating with team and directing the defense	Direct player where to throw on all bunt situations. Remind pitcher to “Get over there” on balls hit to the right side of infield. If pitcher fields bunt remind to “step and throw.” Remind number of outs. Calls all first and third situations. Calls for cutoff man to cut, throw or let it go.		
Giving signs	<b>*See Catching Tutorial on page 31.</b>		
Double Plays	The catcher should position himself one or two steps <b>behind</b> the plate facing the fielder who will throw the ball. Once the ball has been released and the catcher has determined the ball’s path, he moves forward by stepping with his <b>left</b> foot toward the ball. As he develops momentum he drags his right foot across the plate, makes a jump turn toward first base and throws.	Pre-game Teaching in practices	GD Pg 10
Change signs with the pitcher whenever a runner reaches 2b: Pitch out, Pick off from the mound, all pitches and pitch locations.			

## CATCHING

The Skills	Correct Approach	Drills	Resources
Ankle sway	<b>*See Catching Tutorial on page 31.</b>	Bullpens  Teaching in practices Game Teaching	* V# 112
Anticipate Pitch	Know what each pitcher's pitch will do; rise, sink, move away, move in and anticipate the flight of the ball. Get the glove there early and easily to prevent jerky movements, keep the ball in the strike zone and to prevent passed balls.	Long Black Veil  Bullpens	V# 114  V # 112 *  TOTW
Intentional Walks	Although this skill may be seldom used, there comes a time in a catcher's career where he must do it. Stand with the right foot on the edge of the catcher's box. Hold your right hand out, chest high to present a target to the pitcher. As the pitcher delivers the ball, slide laterally to center your chest to the ball. (RH Batter)	Practice once in pre-season to prevent balk.	
Works on his game during bullpens	Practice correct techniques for: framing, softly receiving balls, "sticking" pitches, setting up on the plate, throws back to the pitcher, blocking balls in the dirt, the 3 different stances, giving a low target, practicing footwork on throws to second and third.		
Stances	<b>*See Catching Tutorial on page 31.</b>	Bullpens  Teaching in practices	* V# 112  V# 114
Throws back to the pitcher	Make sharp, accurate throws back to the pitcher and hit him in the chest area. Helps pitcher conserve energy and prevents unnecessary movement on the base paths.	Bullpens  Game Teaching	
<b>Sliding catches:</b> to avoid collisions with teammates as well as fences and dugouts it is best to learn how to slide feet first, then catch the ball in tight places.			
<b>Bullpens are not just for pitchers. Use that time wisely to work on all aspects of your game.</b>			

## HITTING

The Skills	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
<p>Develop sound hitting mechanics and constantly strive to improve</p>	<p><b>Grip:</b> lightly and where the fingers and hands join.</p> <p><b>Stance:</b> both eyes level and looking over the front shoulder at the pitcher. Inside of feet outside shoulders.</p> <p><b>Movement:</b> from inside of front foot to the inside of the back foot.</p> <p><b>Balance:</b> stay balanced throughout the stride and swing. Keep weight back.</p> <p><b>Stride:</b> Front foot goes directly at the pitcher's mound while the hands go directly to the umpire. Land softly on the ball of the closed stride foot. (6-10" only) Get the stride down in time.</p> <p><b>Head:</b> The head stays still and does not go forward. Both eyes on pitcher and level. Chin stays on front shoulder in stance stride and swing. Head is on back shoulder at finish.</p> <p><b>Swing:</b> hips and hands work together to produce a quick, powerful swing.</p> <p><b>Hands:</b> Hands work together to deliver a severe blow; top hand palm up and bottom hand palm down at contact. Concentrate on pitcher's release point.</p> <p><b>Watch ball hit the bat</b></p>	<p><b>Grip:</b> tight and in the palms. (Very common)</p> <p>Tilted head and back eye seeing part of batters nose.</p> <p>Frozen statue technique adds to tension. Hard to pull the trigger.</p> <p>Can't keep your weight back if you never get it back to begin with.</p> <p>Rushing and never activating all of the big power muscles.</p> <p>Head moves because of poor balance, lunging, poor direction, stride too big.</p> <p>Pulling head and front shoulder too soon.</p> <p>Big stride moves head, causes loss of balance.</p> <p>Throw the hands from the start, bypassing power muscles. Not using hips. Does not pivot on back foot.</p> <p>Rolls hands. Extends too early. Drops hands on back side.</p> <p>Poor concentration skills. Does not see ball all the way.</p>	<p>All hitting work should begin with the hitting tee.</p> <p>Soft toss</p> <p>Dry Swings</p> <p>BP</p> <p>Teaching in practices and games.</p>	<p>V# 120</p> <p>V# 110</p> <p>PL Pg 34</p>

## HITTING

The Skills	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
Make consistent contact- line drives	Must have correct swing path. Good use of hands. Quick bat.	Drops hands. Stride too long. Poor grip. Extends hands too early. Hits “around” ball. Head not level. Poor grip.	Tee work. Soft toss. Dry swings. BP.	V# 120 V# 110 PL Pg 34
Hit the ball hard consistently	Quick, short stroke. Gets <b>barrel of bat</b> on the ball.	Poor plate coverage. Strides away from plate. Looping swing.	Tee work. Soft toss. BP	V# 120 V# 110 TOTW
Learn the effective contact points of each pitch location. (inside, middle, outside)	Inside pitch, hit ball just in front of plate. Middle- hit ball on the plate. Outside pitch- let ball travel back on the plate. Hit the inside of the ball.	Late on inside pitch. Pulls outside pitch; hits “around” the ball.	Tee work. BP.	V# 120 PL Pg 34
<p>Become a good situational hitter.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hit behind the base runner at second to move him over.</li> <li>Consistently execute the hit-and-run.</li> <li>Hit the ball on the ground to the middle infielders to drive in a runner from third base (If the infield is playing back.)</li> <li>Hit a fly ball into the “vee” of the outfield to drive in a runner from third base.</li> </ul>	<p>Aware of every situation.</p> <p>Takes outside pitch to opposite field. (RH)</p> <p>Hits ball on ground to the middle of the infield.</p> <p>Looks for a pitch he can handle early in the count.</p> <p>Looks for a pitch “up” early in the count. One he can drive into the outfield.</p>	<p>Does not have a plan at the plate. Very tentative hitter.</p> <p>Gets under the ball. Fly balls. Doesn’t swing.</p> <p>Takes too many pitches.</p> <p>Has not been taught.</p> <p>Does not know his personal strike zone. (What he can do with certain pitches.)</p>	<p>Offensive Batting Practice</p> <p>Opposite field hitting drill</p> <p>Teaching in games</p>	<p>V#110</p> <p>PL Pg 39</p> <p>TOTW</p> <p>Web site</p>
Work hard and concentrate with all drills, tee work, dry swings and batting practice.				

## HITTING

The Skills	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
Become a good 2-strike hitter	Choke up, shorten up and look away. Widen strike zone. Work on making contact. Foul off pitches that are “close and low”. Battle.	Is not aggressive with 2 strikes. Takes close pitches, blames umpire.  Coach sets poor example by begging and blaming umpires.	BP  Game teaching  Tee work Opposite field hitting drill.	V# 116  PL Pg 34  V# 110
Learn to understand “quality” at bats and not concern yourself with batting averages. (Quality= gets a good pitch to hit and hit it hard.)	Be aggressive and look for fastballs early in the count. Do not take fastball strikes.	Is tentative. Takes too many pitches. Always behind in the count. When behind, hitter will see a lot of breaking balls and “teaser” pitches just off the plate.	BP  Opposite field hitting drill  Game teaching	PL Pg 34  V# 110  TOTW
Learn to quickly recognize the differences between the breaking pitch and the fastball (Read the ball out of the pitcher’s hand.)	Concentrates and sees ball out of hand. (Works hard on this skill in BP) Know fastball will come straight down out of hand. Curve will come out, up and then down.	Poor concentration skills. Doesn’t recognize pitch early enough. Has to wait to see spin. Mechanics break down on curve balls.	BP Opposite field hitting drill  Pitch recognition drill  One-knee drill for bat speed.	PL Pg 34 V# 110  V#114  TOTW
Learn to hit the breaking pitch	Recognize early. Keep hands back. Let ball travel the distance and hit ball up the middle or to the opposite field.	Late recognition. Tries to pull ball. Lunges forward and cannot keep hands back.	Opposite field hitting drill Soft toss  Curve ball BP off machine Bounce balls to hitter	V# 110 V# 120 V# 110
Learn the fastball counts (0-0,1-0, 2-0, 2-1, 3-0, 3-2) and “gear up” to hit the fastball in those counts. The first pitch after a pitching change and the next pitch after an off speed pitch that’s a ball. If base runner is a threat to steal you will see more fastballs.	When ahead-2-0, 3-1 look for “your” pitch, an area where you know you can drive the ball. If pitch is not there, take it.	Lack of discipline. Swings at bad pitches. Has not learned his personal strike zone. Needs to mature as a hitter.	BP  Game teaching  Tee work	V# 116  TOTW  V# 120
In batting practice work on hitting the ball up the middle and the other way. (Prepare for the game).	Good work ethic in BP. Works on game. Concentrates to see the ball. Gets fat part of bat on ball.	“Look at me.” Tries to pull every pitch. Gets under ball so he can get lift to try to hit ball out.	BP	PL Pg 34

## HITTING

The Skills	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
Develop discipline to lay off pitches over your hands	Works on this skill in BP. (Even professional players swing at high pitches sometimes.)	Late recognition. Cannot lay off high pitches. Poor discipline.	BP  Game teaching  One-knee drill for bat speed.	PL Pg 34   V# 110
Learn pitchers' tendencies. Study them from the dugout	Watches pitcher's release point. Looks for what he throws when ahead and behind in the count. Looks for pattern.	Clowns around in dugout. Distracts other players. Does not pay attention.	Pitch recognition drill.	V# 114
Swing at fastball strikes	Know fastball counts and does not let a fastball strike go by without an aggressive swing.	Takes too many pitches. Tentative.	BP  Teaching in games	PL Pg 34  TOTW
Develop a sound mental approach	Knows good hitters are aggressive. Thinks "swing" before every pitch. Understands failure. Looks to help team. Good situational hitter.			
Develop good bunting mechanics	Work in BP. Can bunt down either foul line. Give skill high priority. Understands team concept.	Poor balance. Poor plate coverage. Incorrect hand placement. Drops bat head. Reaches for ball.	BP Offensive BP  Teaching in games	PL Pg 38, 39  Web site V# 110 V# 116
Bunt consistently on the first attempt	Bunts strikes. Does not let fastball strike go by. Bunts early in the count. Sees ball out of pitcher's hand and <b>watches ball hit bat.</b>			

## HITTING

The Skills	Correct Approach	Common Mistakes	Drills	Resources
Bunt to locations (not back at pitcher) Make the 1b and 3b field the ball.	3 <sup>rd</sup> base line- point bat head at first base. 1 <sup>st</sup> base line- point knob of bat at third base.	Late getting bat into position. Bunts back to pitcher.	BP Offensive BP Teach bunting early in the pre-season	PL Pg V# 110 V# 116
Bunt for a base hit <b>Watch ball hit bat.</b>	Understands situation. (3 <sup>rd</sup> baseman playing deep.) Stride, drop back foot, point bat head at first base, lower bat and let bat hit ball. (Crossover step for LHB)	Runs out of box too early. (Bunts and runs) You will sometimes see the ball hit the runner. That should never happen.	Offensive BP	V# 110 PL Pg 39 V# 116
Squeeze bunt <b>Watch ball hit bat.</b>	Wait for pitcher's front foot to land before he shows bunt. Bunt top half of ball. Is not concerned with location. Just put ball on ground. Must make contact because runner is coming.	Shows bunt too early. Fails to get the bat on the ball. Poor plate coverage.	Offensive BP	V# 110 PL Pg 39 Web site
Understand the mentality of the sacrifice bunt	Team concept. Willing to sacrifice at-bat for the team.	Concerned only about personal batting average. Not team player. Doesn't get bunt down in first attempt.	Offensive BP Game teaching	V# 110 Web site TOTW
Learn the slash (slug or butcher boy) bunt	Show bunt early. Remain choked pull bat back and hit ball on ground.	Shows bunt late. Doesn't make contact. Overswings. Gets under ball.	BP Can add occasionally to Offensive BP	PL Pg 44 V# 110 TOTW
Be a thinking hitter. Have a plan, know the situations and what you are trying to accomplish with this at-bat.	Runner on second, less than two outs-try to move him over. If asked to bunt, get it down on the first attempt. Runner on third, infield in- fly ball to the V of the outfield. Runner on third infield background ball or fly ball to the V of the field. Have a two-strike approach. Know when a pitcher is trying to walk you, and let him. Don't chase bad pitches. Look for your pitch early in the count.			
<b>On Deck:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time your stride to the pitcher's release.</li> <li>• Study the pitcher's arm slot. (Should also do that on the bench).</li> <li>• Help out with the base runners scoring at the plate. Act as a base coach in that you signal the runner to slide or score standing up.</li> <li>• Make sure all equipment is cleared from around home plate on scoring plays.</li> <li>• Help the runners with balls in the dirt and wild pitches.</li> <li>• Get your sign from the third base coach as you're walking to the plate. This give you time to think about your situation.</li> <li>• Know the situation you're dealing with before you get to home plate.</li> <li>• Relax and take good swings (If desired, use deep breathing).</li> <li>• Get the passed or (nobody on base) foul balls for the opposing catchers.</li> <li>• Study how many times a pitcher looks at each base runner.</li> </ul>				

## BASE RUNNING

The Skills	Correct Approach	Drills	Resources
Develop good running mechanics.	Run with the head up. Run on the balls of your feet. Relax the muscles in your face. Your arms are levers that affect foot speed; use them correctly- loosely clenched fists, arms move from chin to back pocket	Form Running  Sprints  Running the bases	Planner Pg 5  Web site  V# 116
Leave the box correctly and run to first base on contact with the ball.	Drop bat immediately. Drive off rear foot directly toward first base. (Common mistake is to take the first step toward the mound or toward first base dugout.) First strides are short and choppy with body lean to develop quick momentum.	Running the bases  Game teaching	PL PG 41  V# 114 V# 116
Use technique of looking for the ball while running full speed to first base.	Run full speed out of the box. If the ball is hit to your left, take a quick look when you reach the runner's lane to see if the ball went through.  <b>Mistakes-</b> Doesn't look, slows down at base.	Running the bases  Game teaching	PL PG 41  V# 114 V# 116
On all balls hit in the infield- run through base, break down and look right.	Touch the front of the bag, run through at full speed. Put on the brakes after crossing the base, and look to your right for an overthrow. If you see the first baseman preparing to jump or leave the bag for the throw then you need to prepare to slide feet first in the opposite direction and touch the base with your hand. <b>Mistakes-</b> Slows down at base. Does not break down so cannot react to overthrow.	Running the bases  Game teaching	PL PG 41  V# 114 V# 116
Use sound sliding techniques.	Figure-4 technique. One leg under the other in a figure 4. Slide on the calf of the bent leg. Sliding is simply running at full speed and sitting down. Keep your hands up. <b>Mistakes-</b> doesn't run hard, drags hands, lays back.	Cardboard box to teach sliding  Game teaching	Pl Pg 42  V# 114
Learn your On-Base routine.	Before you take your primary lead: 1. Get the signs from the coach as you reach the base.2. Know where the ball is before you leave the base. 3. Know the number of outs. 4. Check the outfield positioning and re-check before every batter. 5. Take your primary lead when the pitcher toes the rubber.	Skull sessions  Pre-season practice	
Take correct primary and secondary leads off each base.	Always lead off with right foot.1 <sup>st</sup> - Three shuffle steps, when pitcher comes set, take two more. When pitcher delivers ball take 3 shuffle hops and react. May take 4 shuffle steps off second base. <b>Mistakes-</b> leads with wrong foot, usually too close to bag, loses concentration.	Game teaching  Teaching in practice  Offensive BP	V# 116  TOTW  PL Pg 40 V# 110

## BASE RUNNING

The Skills	Correct Approach	Drills	Resources
Run correctly on a hit-and-run	Make sure the pitcher goes to the plate before leaving. Never get picked off on a hit and run. The hit and run is a straight steal with a look at the plate after three strides, as the batter swings. Freeze and return on a line drive. (Low line drive, keep running. You'll be doubled off anyway.) Fly ball, go halfway and return if caught. Pick up the third base coach after you swing out and round the base.	Running the bases  Offensive baseball practice  Game teaching	V# 110  TOTW  PL Pg 39
"Read" the ball in the dirt	Know the situation. Know the strength of the catcher's arm. Track the ball into the contact zone. Judge the speed and the type of pitch. Follow the ball as it gets by the catcher. It is more difficult to read a wild pitch on second base. Use the batter to help you.	Game teaching	TOTW
Take a 2-out lead at second base	Take 4 (May take 4 instead of 3 at second base.) shuffle steps away and <b>back</b> from bag to establish arc to third base.	Game teaching  Teaching in practice	TOTW  V# 116
Take a 3-step walking lead at third when pitcher pitches from the stretch	After primary lead, take three-step walking lead as pitcher's front leg lifts. Lead with right foot and time it so that last step is taken as pitch hits glove or bat. Take your lead in foul territory and return in fair territory to force the catcher and 3b to throw and catch around you. (Stay close if 3 <sup>rd</sup> baseman is playing close to the bag.)	Game teaching  Offensive BP  Teaching in practice	TOTW  V# 116  PL Pg 40
Take a 5-step walking lead at third when pitcher pitches from windup	After primary lead, take five-step walking lead as pitcher's begins windup. Lead with right foot and time it so that last step is taken as pitch hits glove or bat.	Game teaching  Offensive BP  Teaching in practice	TOTW  Offensive BP  V# 116
"Read" the ball off the hitter's bat down or up angle	Know the situation. Track the ball into the contact zone. React as the hitter contacts the ball either on the top half or bottom. On bunts, make sure the angle of the ball is down before you go.	Offensive Batting Practice  Game teaching	V# 110  TOTW
Lead at 1b.	Take lead in front of the bag as this appears shorter to the pitcher. Go back to the front corner of the bag with your left foot and avoid contact with the first baseman.		
Great base runners are not always fast but they have great instincts and make split second decisions on their feet. <b>Base coaches are there to stop you, never to start you.</b>			

## BASE RUNNING

The Skills	Correct Approach	Drills	Resources
When on first, concentrate on (RH) pitcher's back heel	If the front leg lifts he will go to the plate. If his back heel comes off the ground, he has to throw over to first base or step back off the rubber.	Can work this in the outfield grass after the game as a conditioning drill also.	TOTW V# 116
Take one-way lead only with LH pitcher LH pitcher-If stealing, steal on <b>first movement</b> and take full lead	Leading with the right foot and facing the pitcher, take three shuffle steps off the bag.	Game teaching  Practices	TOTW
If stealing (LH) and the pitcher throws to first, "read" the middle infielder's eyes as you approach second base. This helps you to keep your body between the throw and the fielder	If you are picked off as you steal on first movement, watch the shortstops eyes as you approach the bag. They will react to the ball. Position yourself between the thrown ball and the infielder. Hopefully the ball will hit you in the back or will cause the first baseman to make a poor throw.	Game teaching  Intrasquad games	TOTW
Learn the delayed steal	The idea of a delayed steal is to take advantage of defensive lapses by the middle infielders. 1. Take your normal primary lead. 2. On the pitch, take your secondary lead. (Shuffle steps, no crossover steps and shoulders squared to the infield.) 3. When the ball hits the catcher's glove, usually third shuffle step, make your break for second base.	Game teaching  Base running	TOTW
Always run hard to all bases. This shows how much you want to win			
Go "half way" on fly balls.	This means to go as far as you can and still be able to get back. Example: if you are at 1b and the fly ball is hit to the right fielder then you should probably go half way literally. On the other hand, when the fly ball is to the left fielder then you can probably go $\frac{3}{4}$ or all the way to 2b and still get back.		
Communicate with your coach.	Third base situations: Is the infield in or back? Are the corner infielders in and the middle infield back? Is the runner at 1b stealing? Are you to break or wait on the throw or batters contact?		

## BASE RUNNING

The Skills	Correct Approach	Drills	Resources
Touch the inside of the bag when rounding bases	Take a banana arc as you approach the bag; touch the inside of the bag with either foot. Do not stagger steps or break stride. Lean in with upper body.	Running the bases  Game teaching	Planner Pg 40  TOTW V#114 V# 116
Major league players' average time in the 60-yard dash is 7.0 seconds.	There are no slow professional or college baseball players. Strive to improve your running time and work hard on drills at practice. <b>Tip:</b> If you hit an infield pop up, use your anger to reach 2b before it's caught. Always hustle.	Form running Base running  Flying 30's 60 yard sprints Arms only drill	Planner V# 114 TOTW  Web site- featured articles
"It takes no talent to hustle."	Take the responsibility to work hard at practice. How you practice is how you play.		
Understand when to attempt to stretch a base hit	Run with the head up, finding the ball in the outfield. Be aggressive and make a full-speed turn around first base. Take advantage of any bobbled ball by the outfielders. (A good time to try for the extra base at second is with two outs.)	Game teaching  Bobbled ball drill.	V# 114
Run downs	When you get in these, stay alive as long as possible. The more players involved the better your chances of stumbling into a fielder (without the ball), which is ruled interference, and you are awarded the next base.	Rundowns off pickoffs.	PL Pg 28
Be aware on the base paths.	Watch the runner ahead of you: If they move up on passed balls, you do to.	Game teaching	
Tagging up.	Watch the ball being caught. Do not "let the coach be your eyes". <b>1b:</b> Only on routine fly balls when sure they will be throwing ahead of the runner tagging up ahead of you. 95% of the time you never tag at 1b. <b>2b:</b> On deep fly balls only. Watch the ball being caught, pause a split second, then go. On fly balls to right and right center watch ball by facing 1b dugout. On balls hit to left and center field watch ball by facing left field. <b>3b:</b> Routine fly balls are easy. Line drives are difficult, so get back quickly. Watch ball being caught, pause a split second, then go. Do not give the umpire a chance to blow the call.	Game teaching  Offensive Batting Practice	PL Pg 39  V# 110

## TEAM

	Source
<b>First and third defenses:</b> Common defenses- Throw through to second, pitcher cut, MI cut, fake throw to second and throw to third, fake throw and hold ball.	V# 116 V# 114 GD
<b>Bunt defenses-</b> First and third basemen crash, third baseman reads bunt and fields it or returns to third, wheel or rotation play.	GD V#116
<b>Defensive positioning:</b> Standard Defensive positioning throughout most of game. Game situations warrant player movement; bunt situations, pull hitters, time of game, effectiveness of pitcher, two outs, game on line.	PL Pg 19 GD V#114
<b>Dugout responsibilities:</b> Watch pitcher's arm slot as he warms up, look to see if runners touch bases, study pitchers' "looks" while holding runners, count pitches, communicate pick-off attempts, bull-pen catcher ready, throw to dugout-side outfielder between innings, pick up equipment, concentrate on the game and talk baseball, pick up" stranded base runners after 3 <sup>rd</sup> out.	
<b>Jog</b> back to your position after every play and always jog onto and off the field.	
<b>Hustle</b> on the base paths. Run out every ground ball and every pop up. This shows how much you want to win.	
<b>Understand:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That every base must be covered on every play.</li> <li>• Who represents the priority out</li> <li>• How to prevent and deal with the possibility of a big inning</li> <li>• How to play defense based on the score and the stage of the game</li> <li>• What hitters are the best hitters</li> <li>• Base stealing situations</li> <li>• Condition of the field</li> </ul>	
<b>ATTITUDE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect the game.</li> <li>• Play with class.</li> <li>• Take Pride the way you play the game.</li> <li>• Show an aptitude to learn. (Be Coachable)</li> <li>• Understand that failure is a part of baseball and learn to react in a mature fashion.</li> <li>• Always try to contribute something positive to the team (no matter how small).</li> </ul>	

# CATCHING TUTORIAL

## What's A Catcher's Number One Job?

Coaches and their catchers should understand that the primary job of the catcher is to “**make his pitcher look good.**” Rob McDonald in his great Catching Video “Catching Skills and Drills” said those words and I can find no better way to improve on them.

A catcher makes his pitchers look good by the way he receives the ball, by his body language, attitude, by the way the throws the ball back to the pitcher, by making all the routine plays, by the way he directs the defense and by the way he calls the game. No other way to say it; he should think of his pitcher first.

## Who To Choose For The Position?

At the youth and high school level find a player who wants to play there. You must get feedback from him on his **desire** to play the position. It would be a waste and detrimental to your team to spend hours training a catcher only to discover later that he really didn't have the desire to catch.

Look for an athletic player. The ideal description is a **slow shortstop**; great feet, strong arm, soft hands, quickness and athleticism.

**Toughness**, both mental and physical. This demanding position comes with constant small hurts, exacting mental involvement and requires more stamina than anyone on your team. Because the catcher handles the ball so many times in a game, his concentration skills must be at a high level. He must be fearless to the extent that he block balls in the dirt with good technique. He must be fearless to the extent that he sets up inside. Just as some hitters don't like to be pitched inside, some catchers don't like to set up inside.

He must not display negative emotion toward his pitcher when he is struggling. I have seen this many times at the youth level and it surely will bring a team down. The pitcher loses his control and his catcher through body language or verbiage, demonstrates bad temper and irritability. Nothing can hasten a team toward defeat more than that.

**Leadership** attributes. The catcher has to “show the way.” Mental toughness goes a long way toward being a leader. He must show confidence in, and develop a good relationship with his pitching staff. He must communicate with his pitchers and his coaches.

He should:

1. Know each pitcher's best pitch.
2. Know what type of command his pitchers have with each pitch.
3. Talk with his pitcher between innings.
4. Study the strengths and weaknesses of the hitters.
5. Regulate the tempo of the game.

He must “run” the game by calling defensive and pitching signs and by directing defensive situations.

Here are some catching tips and instruction.

### **The Three Stances**

**I. Sign-giving Stance-** the feet should be square to the pitcher and on the balls of the feet about 1 foot apart. Set up in the middle of the plate with the left knee pointing at the shortstop and the right knee pointing at the second baseman. (Not in the holes; where they are supposed to play.)

Place the glove outside the left knee to block the view of the third base coach. With a runner on first he can point his right knee at the pitcher to keep the base runner from peeking.

Tuck the elbow and place the hand and fingers over the cup area. Lay the forearm over the hip flexor to keep the elbow still so as not to tip signs. (**Make sure the fingers do not go below the crotch. Keep them along the seam of the pants.**)

The upper trunk is erect. Before giving the sign, check where the batter is in the box and make sure he is not peeking.

**II. No One on Base Stance-** Position the feet just inside the shoulders with the weight on the inside of the feet and the toes turned out slightly. (Have your young catchers “walk like a duck” to get the feeling.) Squat down on your ankles with your rear to eliminate tension on the thighs and allow for more comfort. The back is erect and the head is up. The glove arm is semi-extended to give a target so that the elbow is not tucked inside the knee or resting on the knee. The target should be visible and stationary until the pitcher releases the ball. The glove is in a relaxed position with the fingers at a 45° angle at the pitcher. (Thumb at 5 o’clock.)

Always check your distance from the batter. Since hitter’s positions in the box vary make sure you are not too far away from his back leg. You should be able to reach out and almost touch his back knee with the tip of your glove. The throwing hand should be behind the right ankle.

**III. Stance With Men on Base -** At the advanced level this is also the stance with two strikes on the batter, whether or not there are men on base. Feet are shoulder-width apart on the balls of the feet with the heels softly touching the ground. Knees are inside the ankles and the rear end is elevated so that the thighs are parallel to the ground, while still presenting a low target.

The chest must be up, not bent over. Place the throwing hand behind the glove and tuck the thumb slightly so that the hand is relaxed.

This allows the catcher to be quicker in blocking balls in the dirt, it also helps him get the ball out of the glove faster if the runner attempts to steal.

### **Receiving the Ball**

Cup the palm of the glove hand. As the ball is released make a ¼ **turn** to the left or (simply relax the hand). This allows for more wrist flexibility and helps the catcher receive the ball softly. (This movement does not involve lowering the arm. It is to relax the hand and help get the glove moving.)

It's vital that the catcher receive the ball in such a way that **strikes remain strikes**; that he doesn't let them travel out of the strike zone. He is not trying to deceive the umpire; he is helping him call a strike a strike. He must catch the ball firmly with his arm extended away from his body (extended but maintain some flex and relaxation) and as close to the plate as possible. He cannot let the force of the pitch move the glove out of the strike zone. He must "stick" it. This is a strength issue; strength and a lot of practice. This is a real skill. The catcher has to be able to receive the ball firmly, be strong enough to stop the momentum of the ball and yet catch it softly.

For pitches on the edges, or just off the plate, catch the **outside half** of the ball. "Frame" the pitch by turning the glove in slightly toward the strike zone. Catch the low pitch **out in front of your body** and the high one as close to your body as possible. Try to catch the top back half of the ball.

Get the glove **over** the high pitch. Many high pitches have become passed balls because the catcher let them "tick off" the top of his glove.

A catcher should learn "**ankle sway**" to center his body on pitches just outside his shoulders. We have often talked about pitchers learning to throw within the confines of the catcher's shoulders- using the shoulders as a frame.

On balls outside that frame, the catcher should slightly shift his body in the direction of the pitch. By keeping his lower body loose and relaxed, he can center his body on the pitch. He should think of getting his "eyes behind the ball." This sway should be fluid and smooth. There are no jerky movements. This is an advanced technique and is used on close pitches just outside the shoulders.

As an example this technique might come into play when the catcher sets up on the outside corner and the pitch is off his shoulder to the inside part of the plate. If he makes a herky-jerky movement to receive the ball the umpire will often call it a ball. By making a smooth, natural movement, he may get the strike.

On pitches off the plate and outside the strike zone the catcher should learn the technique of taking a step with his **near foot to the ball**.

That step in the direction of the ball with his near foot only, allows him to center the ball as it arrives.

### **Blocking Balls in the Dirt**

The mindset of the catcher should be that he must not try to catch or short hop balls in the dirt. He must attempt to block them. By blocking every ball in the dirt, even with no runner on and less than two strikes, it will come easier for him when the game is on the line. A by-product of this is that the pitcher will trust the catcher to block his curve ball in the dirt. He will have the confidence to throw it with runners on base or with two strikes.

**Most balls in the dirt are missed because the catcher tried to catch, rather than block them.**

The catcher should shorten the distance to the hop of the ball by dropping forward and down. Lead with the glove and drop to both knees. The glove should cover the hole between the knees and be behind the legs. If the glove is not pushed back between the legs it can become a “ramp” for the ball to take off. Spread the thumb and fingers in the glove to make it as wide as possible. Make sure the eyes are focused on the ball. Get the chest down over the ball.

As the ball comes in follow it with your eyes. This will make you tuck your chin and keep the ball away from the throat area.

To soften the impact of the ball relax the upper body and get that chest down over the ball. (The catcher can loosen his chest protector to help soften the impact.)

Ball to the **Left** and **Right**. If the ball is outside the width of the catcher’s stance, he should drive with the opposite foot toward the ball and try to put the near-knee on the ball and funnel it toward home late.

Remember to gain ground to shorten the hop and the angle. (The toughest balls to block are the ones to the bare-hand side.)

### **A Word About Throwing Mechanics**

Instructing players how to throw is the most important developmental item a coach can teach.

We are just going to talk about catchers throwing here.

“**Right over might.**” Concentrate on throwing accuracy rather than worrying about arm strength. (This is where the “Results oriented” coach fails. He concerns himself only with the strength of the arm and what a player can do for him now.

He is not willing to take the best-projected player, put him in position, and allow him to fail as he learns.) If you have a sound baseball program arm strength will come naturally as players develop.

Throwing accuracy is not just developed during catcher drills. It begins with your stretch, form run and throw program.

Teach good throwing mechanics; 4-seam grip on every throw, front shoulder closed to the target, elbow shoulder high, fingers on top of the ball and thumb underneath.

Try to help players overcome any blatant arm action faults that will impede their progress.

### **Throwing to Second Base**

One of the most important things a catcher can do to improve his throwing to bases is improving his footwork. Quick feet and correct technique can help overcome the lack of the strongest arm.

Note: All footwork is designed not only for quickness but to keep the catcher from stepping on the plate; a surefire way to slip and cause a high and inaccurate throw.

The catcher should **remain low** as he receives the ball. (Try to remain as low as the ball as you receive it.) He raises up **as he throws** but he should take care not to jump up while receiving the ball.

As the ball approaches, the catcher develops momentum by **leaning** toward the ball. He leans toward the ball but allows it to travel the distance. (A rule of thumb is to start your lean as the ball breaks the plane of the infield grass-clay area.) If the ball hits your glove before you begin to move, it is too late.

On pitches from the middle to the outer half of the plate use the **Jab Step or Pivot Step**.

With the **Pivot**, simply pivot on the right foot as the ball approaches, step and throw. (This takes a stronger arm because the legs aren't used as much.)

With the **Jab Step** jab with the right foot toward the ball at a 45° angle, step with the left foot and throw.

(A note to youth coaches: there is no time for a crow hop. It is better to bounce the ball to second base than allow catchers to crow hop.)

On pitches that are middle-in, use the **Jump Pivot**. Slide your right foot laterally to where your left foot was and move your left foot forward.

The move is a 90° angle jump that closes off the body to second base. (The back foot is parallel to the front edge of home plate. The left heel is in a direct line with the right heel and the front toe is pointing at second, (or slightly closed.) The front shoulder is pointing at second base.

On pitches that are outside the strike zone, the catcher uses the “near foot” method to get to the ball.

**Upper Half-** The **exchange** of the ball in the glove to the throwing hand is critical. Many bad throws are a result of poor ball exchange.

1. Stay low as you receive the ball. (Cue: Stay as low as the ball.)
2. Make a two-handed catch. This will give you time to get a 4-seam grip on the ball.
3. “Drive the ball through the letters.” (Allow the glove to push the ball straight up to the throwing position.) This helps close off the front shoulder and gets the throwing elbow up to shoulder height.

**Arm action-** The catcher uses a short-arm action. The hand takes the ball out of the glove (4-seam grip) straight back to the throwing position (not down, back and up); fingers on top and thumb underneath with the ball facing back toward the backstop.

### Coaching checkpoints:

1. Make sure the catcher's front side is closed to second base. That is why pushing the glove back with the hand is so important. It helps close off that front side, gives the catcher time to get a 4-seam grip and helps him make a good exchange.
2. Make sure the back elbow is shoulder-high.
3. Make sure he clears that front side as he throws. (Squares his body to second base.)
4. Make sure he gets his chest over a bent front leg. Do not let him recoil.
5. Watch his back foot. It should be perpendicular to second base.
6. Make sure he doesn't step open (front foot toward the third base line.) this is very common in young catchers as they try to get the ball off quickly.

### Throwing To Third Base

When throwing to third base the same upper body throwing mechanics are used. But the footwork is different.

On most pitches the catcher will clear behind the (RH) hitter by shuffling his **right foot behind his left**, closing off his front side and throw. This shuffle clears him from the hitter.

Only on throws that are outside of the plate when he must make the "near foot" step to his right, should he be forced to step in front of the hitter.

He steps with his right foot to receive the ball, steps with his left foot in front of the plate, closes and throws. The catcher should never throw over the batter's head. He must clear the batter to avoid high throws.

### Pitch Outs

**Right-Handed Hitter-** The catcher sets up so the outside corner of the plate cuts him in half. He should always anticipate a bad throw. As the pitcher's arm moves toward home plate he makes a short lateral movement with his left foot. As the ball is released he steps with the right foot toward the ball closes his front side and throws.

**Left-handed Hitter-** The catcher sets up so the outside edge of home plate cuts him in half. He takes a lateral step with his right foot as the arm moves forward. As the ball is released he steps with his left foot toward the ball and then uses the footwork he is comfortable with. (Usually the jump pivot.)

### Fielding Bunts

On all bunt plays the catcher should move to the ball quickly and throw his mask away from the ball. As he nears the ball he should shorten his steps to maintain control of his body. He should then widen his base so he can get his body over the ball. (Chest over the ball.) He should sweep the ball into his hand with his glove. This is a raking motion and must be practiced. It allows the catcher to keep his feet moving as he fields the bunt.

**Balls bunted along the first base line-** On throws to first base he should approach the ball from the left side (belly button facing the foul line.) If the ball is close to the foul line he should clear himself by taking a step back with his right foot, step and throw.

He can make a crow hop to give the first man covering the bag time to set up for the throw and to give himself some rhythm in his throw. The crow hop also cuts the distance of his throw. He should step in the direction of his throw and make sure he keeps his hand above his elbow. (Good throwing mechanics are a must.

On bunted balls where the catcher has a play at second or third, he should run directly at the ball.

**Balls bunted down the third base line-** If the throw is to first base, he should field the ball with his back facing first base. If the ball has stopped, he should place his right foot next to the ball and step out with his left foot as he throws.

If the ball is still rolling he should get his left foot as close to the ball as possible so he has enough space to field the ball as it rolls to his right.

### Tag Plays

The catcher should **face the throw** with his left heel just off the corner of the plate and his left toe pointed down the foul line. This positioning gives the runner the plate and interference will not be called on the catcher. As he takes the throw, he should make sure his left knee is facing the approaching runner. The shin guard protects it. If he lets the side of his leg face the runner, he is taking a chance on a serious knee injury.

1. He should keep his legs flexed with his weight over his left leg.
2. He should anticipate a bad throw.
3. He should square his chest to the play.
4. He should not leave the plate unless the throw is offline.

With the runner bearing down on him the catcher's attention must be on the ball. He should let it travel the distance and make the catch with two hands. Leave the facemask on. At higher levels of baseball, the impact can be enormous so leave it on.

“ But coach, I can't see the incoming ball with my mask on.” The answer to that is, “You can catch an 80 mph fastball with your mask on. Leave it on.”

As the runner slides, the catcher should move to block the plate entirely. He goes to his knees and forces the runner away from the plate. (He hooks him away from home plate. Coach Grant calls it riding him out.)

As he makes the tag he should keep the ball in his bare hand and that hand in the glove with the back of the glove facing the runner. After he has made the tag he should immediately look up and be ready for other runners trying to advance.

There can be times when the runner knows he will be out and may make the attempt to run into the catcher. Instead of playing “macho man” and possibly getting injured, the catcher can make

the runner look silly simply by making the tag with his hands and spinning out of the way, to his left. The runner's momentum may cause him to bury his nose in the dirt.

### **The Throw From Right Field**

On throws from right field there has been a change in the way some teams teach their catchers to set up. They move slightly to their right to receive the throw and the step they take to block the runner is a larger one. Heels in front of the right side of the plate, catcher catches the ball and steps with his left foot to block, goes to the knees and rides the runner away from the plate.

### **Double Plays**

On ground balls with the bases loaded the catcher should remind the umpire of the runner in the lane to make sure he runs in the "runner's box" and does not interfere by getting in the way of the path of the ball.

The catcher should position himself one or two steps **behind** the plate facing the fielder who will throw the ball. Once the ball has been released and the catcher has determined the path of the ball, he moves forward by stepping with his left foot toward the ball. As he develops momentum toward the ball he drags his right foot across the plate, makes a jump turn toward first base and throws. By dragging his foot across the plate he gets his body moving and he doesn't have to look down to see if he touched the plate.

### **Pop Ups**

Remember that the majority of pop ups will go in the opposite direction of the batter. A right hand batter- the ball will usually go to the catcher's right. That is because pop ups behind the plate are caused by the hitter being late to the ball.

If a right hand hitter is in the box and he pops the ball up behind the plate, the catcher should grasp his mask under his chin, pull out and away and spin to his right to look up for the ball.

On balls that are straight up, find the ball and throw the mask away when the ball is at its apex.

On low pop ups that the catcher must run to get, just drop the mask and go.

On balls between home plate and the backstop, he should turn his back to the infield. That is because the ball has backspin on it and will move toward the infield.

He should catch pop ups over his head. The lone exception is a pop up that he has to move toward the pitcher's mound to catch. Then, with his chest toward the infield he should catch the ball below his shoulders.

### **Intentional Walk**

The catcher must be in the catcher's box when the ball is pitched or a balk will be called.

RH Hitter- stand with the right foot on the edge of the catcher's box. Hold your right hand out, chest high to present a target to the pitcher. As the pitcher delivers the ball, slide laterally to center your chest to the ball.

# COMMON FAULTS AT THE CATCHING POSITION

(From A Coaches Guide To baseball Excellence)

Over the past four years we have devoted a section in every Baseball Excellence Monthly Newsletter to catching. We want to emphasize how important that position is and how small flaws in mechanics can negatively affect the outcome of a game. A mistake-prone catcher is like a poor quarterback on a football team. You are not going to win many games, the games won't go smoothly, and you or your players won't have much fun.

Poor catching can make a game look pretty ugly. The pitcher doesn't get the borderline strikes, there are too many passed balls, base runners steal at will and the defense deteriorates and self-destructs.

Whenever there is a lot of movement on the base paths the defense is put under pressure and mistakes frequently occur. A competent catcher can put a stop to much of that folly.

As the coach, I like a game where the pitcher works fast and throws strikes, the hitters swing the bats, the defense makes the routine plays and the game moves along at a brisk pace.

In fact, that is the heart of coaching baseball. A coach aspires to get his players to the level where competent play is the norm rather than the exception. And it all starts with a skilled pitcher and catcher.

## Throwing To Bases

The most common mistakes are with the feet. Look at the feet first. Here are the most serious transgressions a catcher makes when he throws to a base:

- He *crow hops*. A catcher doesn't have time to take those extra steps. By the time a catcher has taken a crow hop, a runner at full speed has taken 4-6 strides. If a youth coach will just put a stop to that unnecessary movement he will give his catcher much more of an advantage. Misuse of the crow hop is very common in youth catchers.
- When he executes a jump pivot, he *jumps back*. This movement takes him further away from the base he is throwing to.  
The drill here is to draw lines in the clay behind his heels when his feet are in the receiving position. Watch them as he executes a jump pivot. If the right foot moves behind the position of the left heel he has made an unnecessary movement. The 'teach' is to tell the catcher to "change places with your feet." His right foot should land in the spot where his left foot originally was.
- He jumps *'around the corner'*. His feet move back and too far to his left. It is actually as if he has jumped around the corner of a building. Again, "change places with your feet."
- He does not *close off* his back foot properly. If he is throwing to second base, his right anklebone should be pointing at the bag, not somewhere between third base and the shortstop.
- He steps *open* with this left foot. (He steps toward the shortstop instead of second base.) This will pull his front shoulder off direction to the base. Throws will often be to the shortstop side of second base. Let's don't forget the **upper body**. There are plenty of mistakes made here also:

- His front shoulder *flies open*. One reason may be the front foot we mentioned earlier. A more common reason is that in an effort to throw hard, the catcher starts the throwing motion prematurely before his front foot lands.
- *He drops his elbow* when he throws. There is that dreaded ‘low elbow’ again. Often this is an error in timing or the distance is too challenging. You will often see the ball ‘sail’ high and away as it approaches second base.
- His *arm path* is too long. Instead of straight back, he goes down, back and up. A catcher must ‘short-arm’ his throwing motion. This is one reason why pitchers should not be catchers. This category also includes **faulty arm action**. They are plentiful among young catchers. You won’t see too many at higher levels of play because by that time faulty arm action has forced young players out of the game.
- He doesn’t *close off* his front side. He never adequately closes off his front side to second base. The way to teach good technique is to have the catcher bring glove, throwing hand and ball straight back to the back shoulder together. He then continues with his throwing arm to the cocked position while the front elbow is pointing at the base. This helps his front shoulder stay closed.
- He doesn’t have a *4-seam* grip on the baseball. This takes practice. By the time he catches the ball to the time he is in the cocked position he must have a 4-seam grip. Otherwise he may throw a slider to the base.
- He slips on home plate. This is embarrassing. Teach the jump pivot for inside pitches and the jab step for outside pitches. This will help keep the catcher’s feet away from the plate.

### Plays At The Plate

- The biggest mistake here is that the catcher doesn’t show the front of his left leg to the runner. He exposes the side of his leg and leaves himself open to a serious knee injury.
- Catchers often position themselves too far up the line. They should be just in front of home plate and just in front of the foul line, facing the throw.
- They may not get low enough.
- They don’t use the glove correctly to make the tag. Keep the ball in the bare hand and tag the runner with the back of the glove. Leave a little space between the ball and the glove to absorb the shock.
- They take off their mask. Leave the mask on. They can receiver a pitcher’s best fastball with the mask on; they certainly can catch a ball thrown from the outfield.

### Receiving The Ball

Let’s review a few common receiving errors:

- Instead of *holding* the pitch firmly the catcher lets it travel into his body. This action impedes the umpire’s view of the baseball and may take the ball out of the strike zone.
- He pushes a *low pitch* into the ground, taking away a possible strike. He must learn to ‘stick it.’
- He constantly is guilty of *too many passed balls*. This may be partially due to a young catcher’s inability to anticipate the path of the pitch. There is also the possibility he may be in the wrong position. Catching is hard and it requires a very athletic player.

- Receiving the *high pitch incorrectly*. The catcher must learn to get his glove above the high pitch. Many times poor technique will cause the ball to ‘tick’ off the top of his glove.
- He catches the ball in the webbing of his glove instead of in the pocket. That makes it more difficult to get the ball out quickly.
- He receives the ball in the webbing of the glove. The catcher should catch the ball in the pocket, not the webbing.
- *Hard hands* is the opposite of ‘soft hands.’ It is the inability to receive the ball correctly. The catcher may stab at the ball or it may often bounce out of his glove. If correct technique has been taught this may just be lack of athletic ability.

### **Blocking Balls in the Dirt**

- One of the most common faults among young catchers is trying to *short hop or catch* a ball in the dirt instead of trying to block it. This requires constant verbal reinforcement and hours of blocking drills.
- After a catcher blocks the ball he doesn’t *hustle* after it and allows the runner to advance.
- He fails to get in the *proper catching position* with runners on base (or with 2 strikes). He must unlock his hips and raise his haunches to make it easier to drop down to block the ball in the dirt. (Very common mistake)

The catcher must learn to:

1. Get to his knees very quickly. He might think of “exploding forward and down.”
2. Bend over the ball and absorb it with his body. His upper body should “roll over” the ball. In this manner he can gain a measure of control of the ball.

Practice these techniques as “shadow drills.” He may do them at home.

## THROWING BULLPENS

We have several times in the past, discussed throwing bullpens. Besides our Newsletter articles there is a section in our Coaches Practice Planner and we have offered suggestions in past Tips. What we want to do is offer additional thoughts and give you the benefit of our experience on this very important subject.

### Pre-game Goals

What should the pitcher try to accomplish when he throws a pen? We don't want him to just toe the rubber and start firing away. We want him to have a purpose and he should understand his goals.



Establish command of all his pitches.



Gain the correct rotation on each of his pitches. Get the proper backspin on the fastball so that there is no “wobble.”



Get a good “down” rotation on the curve ball.



Gain the “feel” or “touch” of his pitches. This goes along with rotation. Feel how the ball comes out of the hand.



Pitches that are inside vs. outside have slightly different release points, so the pitcher wants to learn to consistently manipulate the ball.



Mentally check his mechanics; good balance, direction, cocked position, follow through.



Keep mentally focused on hitting the catcher's glove, a pitcher's number one obligation.



Gradually build to full velocity. Control first- then velocity.

### Tips

Here are some tips to use when your pitchers throw their pens. More than tips, these are important objectives for the pitching coach to consider.



The (pitching) coach should attend every bullpen session and carefully monitor every pitch each pitcher throws.

He should also regulate the pitcher's effort. Overthrowing can result in a breakdown of mechanics and flat (no movement), hittable pitches.



We recommend that he position himself at two different places at various times during the session; directly even with the rubber from the "hands" side and directly behind him.



After 5 or 6 warm up throws, the pitcher should begin throwing at 75% effort. **Never begin throwing at full effort.**



Throw every pre-game pen the exact same way. It is important to establish a routine for your pitchers and catchers.

Eventually a well-planned routine will give your pitchers confidence and free them so they can get mentally focused on the task at hand.



The catchers count all pitches. This allows the pitcher to focus on preparing for his game.



Is a pre-game bullpen the time to make suggestions as to mechanics? **Yes.** You want your pitcher to go into the game with his best possible chance for success. If you have to make minor mechanics changes then do so. Faults that are common are rushing, low elbow, too much early effort, or simply an individual fault the pitcher has been trying to correct. This is part of an athlete's aptitude. Does he have the athletic intelligence to make changes and incorporate them on the fly? In other words, "Is he coachable?"



The most important aspect of throwing a bullpen is establishing pitch command, putting the baseball where the pitcher wants to put it.



Throw 1/2 of the bullpen from the stretch. (Advanced baseball) A pitcher's most important pitches are thrown from the stretch position. Do not neglect this step. Pitching from the stretch means there are runners on base. There are more dangers; there is more to think about and more situations can occur. Pitching from the stretch should be automatic so he doesn't have to think about his mechanics.



A pitcher should take every bullpen seriously. His concentration level should be very high.



Allow enough time for the pre-game pen. Twenty minutes before game-time is customary. Learn to time it so the pitcher has time to get a drink of water and relax for a minute or so before he takes the mound.

## The Pen

It is important to throw every pre-game pen **the same way**. Establishing this routine facilitates pitch command, allows mechanics work and builds confidence. This is the way we do it and this is the way we suggest.

**1** The catcher stands behind the plate and the pitcher throws him 5-6 easy tosses from in front of the rubber.

**2** The catcher takes his “No Runners On Base” stance behind the plate, one foot off the plate on the inside. (RH pitcher to a RH batter.) His glove and body should be centered **one foot off** the plate.

**3** From the windup the pitcher throws 4 fastballs, two four-seam and two 2-seam. His focus is on getting good backspin rotation on his pitches and as always, hitting the glove.

**4** The catcher moves **one foot off** the outside of the plate and the pitcher repeats the sequence.

**5** The catcher then moves to, and centers his glove on the **inside corner**- 4 fastballs (2 and 4-seam) this time from the stretch.

**6** Next, the **outside corner** from the stretch- 4 fastballs. (2 and 4-seam) On all pitches from the stretch, the catcher assumes his “runners on base” stance. (Bullpens are not just for pitchers. They are for catchers too.)

Remember we want the pitcher to hit the glove but there is a fail-safe measure. At no time should the pitcher throw outside the frame of the catcher’s shoulders. That’s another directive. He may miss the glove slightly but if he remains inside the shoulders, the pitcher still has a chance of getting a strike. Staying inside the shoulders is the pitcher’s margin for error.

Do you see what we’re doing here? Much of what we’re attempting to accomplish is trying to establish pitch command. **Everything centers on a pitcher’s ability to make his pitch.** The pitcher is learning to throw the ball where he wants to. (Over the course of a season, this regimen should greatly help your pitchers with their accuracy.) I believe that sequence of 16 straight fastballs to the four spots is a great way to develop fastball command.

You will notice that no fastballs are thrown on the middle of the plate. Throwing a fastball on the middle is a mistake, so why practice it?

But why those 8 fastballs one foot off each side of the plate? The pitcher is learning to hit the glove and not focus on, or rely on the plate as a target. Besides, there are times the pitcher may want to “tease” the hitter just outside the strike zone.

Or he may want to pitch inside off the plate. Or he may have an umpire that will give him one side of the plate or the other. Wouldn't it be beneficial if the pitcher had command of those areas?



Next up is the breaking pitch. The catcher stands up and the pitcher steps a few feet in front of the rubber and simply spins the ball to his catcher.

Nice and easy, getting good forward spin of the ball and making sure he keeps his elbow shoulder high. Four or five easy curveballs, getting forward spin, which causes the ball to drop.

Then the catcher sets up on the middle and his pitcher throws 6 curveballs, three from the stretch. I am a fastball freak. I don't want a lot of curve balls thrown in a game anyway. Five or six in a seven-inning game is enough. (In order to gain fastball command you have to throw the fastball.)



The catcher sets up on the middle of the plate and the pitcher throws 6 change ups. He has gradually increased his effort so he is close to full speed. We throw the change up as the third pitch so the pitcher concentrates on throwing his changes with fastball arm speed. His session has progressed to full effort throwing. Listen to the sound the pitcher's arm makes when he throws his fastball. (Close your eyes and **listen**.) The same degree of effort should occur when he throws his change up. If the sound is less or absent, then he has slowed his arm. It is vital the pitcher throw his change up with fastball arm speed. And we want the pitcher to throw this pitch for a strike. It is desirable that hitters offer at the change up, so we practice putting it where he is likely to swing at it- the middle of the plate.

We view the change up as a "contact pitch" not a swing and a miss pitch. It is desirable to have the hitter offer at your change up. Thus at the high school level and below, we throw it on the middle of the plate.



Up to this point, the pitcher has thrown 28 pitches and has gradually built up to full velocity.

The last twelve we want him to mix up his pitches; throw all three pitches, six from the windup and six from the stretch. The pitching coach wants to see the velocity difference between the fastball and the change up so the first four pitches of this sequence are; fastball, change, fastball, change. (He is also listening.)

Then throw two "best" 4-seam fastballs up and in.

That leaves six pitches and the catcher moves to various locations on the plate. The pitcher has the freedom to throw what he wants here.

Some coaches have a hitter stand in the last few pitches to provide realism. I have always felt if the pitcher is concentrating hard enough on the glove, the hitter shouldn't even come into his mental focus. Good pitching is a highly advanced form of playing catch. If the pitcher is able to hit his spots, the presence of the hitter is moot. The pitcher threw the pitch he wanted to; what the hitter did was irrelevant. He has no control over what the hitter does with his pitch. All he should concentrate on is making that pitch.

**I don't believe the pitcher should even look at the hitter. He should use the catcher's glove as his only target.**

Not only could it be a distraction but hitters stand in different areas of the box and a pitcher's perspective would be constantly changing if he used the hitter to orientate his pitches on the plate.

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The above routine is a very effective method for throwing a pre-game bullpen. Forty pitches are not too many for adolescent pitchers because more than half of the session is at less than full effort. Youth pitchers may elect to throw a series of three fastballs instead of four. The curveball should be shunned at the pre-adolescent level.

### **Mid-Week Bullpens**

During the pre-season and the regular season, the pitcher should throw a bullpen. He should throw it, 2-3 days before his next start. I recommend throwing this pen just like the pre-game one. However, the length of the season and fatigue factors may alter the degree of effort. The pitcher may even elect to shorten the distance with his catcher and throw with just 50% effort; working on a particular pitch or something with his mechanics. This "short pen" can be from flat ground as well. (Youth league mounds are usually not high enough to make any appreciable difference.) Flat ground pitching takes less out of the pitcher. His stride is shorter and there is less energy expended. Pitchers can do light throwing on the other days. After long toss they can pair off and work on different aspects of their game. They can do various drills or one can assume the part of the catcher and throw a very light pen.

Some professional teams do that every day.

(From the Nov-Dec 2000 Newsletter.) *"After long toss, the pitchers pair off and throw to each other. "The pitchers come in to 50-60 feet and do flat ground throwing. They don't use catchers; they throw to each other. This is time when they work on the "feel" of their pitches. And they work on their mechanics.*

*They throw this way every day: 5 fastballs from the windup, five breaking pitches and 5 change ups.*

*Then they throw 15 more from the stretch. One pitcher in each pair acts as a catcher and they switch every 5 balls.*

*The pitchers throw at about 50-60% of full velocity. They do this every day, even if they had pitched in a game the day before. They are always under the watchful eye of the pitching coach. He will make occasional suggestions as to their mechanics."*

### **Every Day**

Let's examine "every day."

The body needs rest in order to rejuvenate itself. But in order to develop arm strength and command you have to throw the baseball. So, what to do?

Use rain days and Sundays to rest. There are always enough wet days in the summer to allow the body to rest. And if your pitchers throw several days in a row, regulate their throwing effort. Simply play catch with a purpose. You want to maintain that “feel” of the baseball as much as you can.

That is what I mean when I say, “throw every day”. Regulate the effort, take a weekend off now and then and use rain days for the mental side of the game. But make no mistake, there are so many Latin players in the major leagues because they “threw everyday” when they were younger.

Another important factor is that pitchers should learn to listen to their bodies. They should know when enough is enough or if their arm doesn’t “feel right.” A coach should never make a player play through pain. At the first sign of discomfort, he should shut the player down.

### **Regulate the Effort**

Making sure pitchers don’t overthrow or throw too hard at the beginning of a session is an important job for the pitching coach. Young pitchers especially, may have their adrenaline flowing before a pre-game bullpen and have a tendency to expend too much effort too early. Not only is that not conducive to developing muscle memory for good mechanics it is not conducive to maintaining a healthy arm. Don’t throw with 100% much effort until the body is ready.

It is important for pitchers to get the “feel” of their pitches early in the bullpen session. Overthrowing prevents that. A coach should never make velocity a goal when a pitcher is pitching or throwing a bullpen.

Velocity itself it not the goal. The goal is to improve mechanics to the point that velocity will take care of itself. He should never implore upon a pitcher to throw harder. Pitching coaches should prevent a “macho” attitude with young pitchers.

I have seen young pitchers take the bullpen mound and begin firing as hard as they could. “Look at me.” I don’t believe that young pitchers should make velocity a number one goal. That focuses too much attention on the throwing arm and not on other important things; letting the body help the arm throw, gaining command and movement, and improving mechanics. Let velocity come in its own good time.

I am not saying velocity is not a powerful tool. It is. But I am saying that it should not be the **only focus** of a young pitcher. You want to develop pitchers, not throwers .It is easier to develop **pitch command** and the muscle memory that comes with it when you don’t throw at full speed. And not throwing at full speed helps protect the arm while developing that command. It gives pitchers more opportunities to work on things. So regulate that effort.

## The Pitcher As Coach

Athletic intelligence- you've heard us mention this phrase many times. It's the ability to adapt on the "fly"; to think on one's feet; to be coachable, to be inquisitive. When a pitcher is in a game, he cannot rely on the pitching coach for constant help. The coach can't go running out there every time a pitcher's mechanics break down or he loses his focus.

The pitcher must become a coach. He must learn to adapt and change. And he must do this on the mound, in the middle of a game. He must know his own body and the correct feel of his delivery so that he can make those changes.

## The Pitching Coach As Coach

Helping a pitcher get that feeling is one of the great values of a good teacher. A good coach helps the young pitcher understand the pitching process and gives him the necessary tools to compete. He helps the pitcher develop **mental toughness**. He becomes a confidant because he needs feedback from his pitchers. He must have the ability to **communicate** and he must do it with short phraseology that the pitcher can understand quickly. When a pitcher is throwing his bullpen session, he can't stop to talk about pitching theory. He has to have a phrase at hand; a cue that will immediately help put his pitcher back on track.

He understands what certain **pitches** are supposed to do and he teaches pitchers how to throw them and at the correct times in the count or game. The pitching coach learns to understand how a pitcher uses his own abilities. He learns what he can and cannot do. Everyone is different.

He should stress the importance of side work as well as game work.

He should teach and monitor an **arm care program** for all his pitchers.

He should be pleased with the progress a pitcher makes as opposed to relying on "stats" as a way to measure performance. (You all know what I think of stats.)

The pitching coach should minimize the importance of the radar gun and its role in becoming a complete pitcher. **Command, movement and mental toughness** have high priority.

Learn the key points of each pitchers' delivery; balance, direction, landing, arm slot.

Make his pitchers feel comfortable around him and show openness and a willingness to communicate.

**Demand** conformity and 100% effort in all routines, drills and duties.

Always keep the health of a pitcher foremost in mind.

## A WORD ABOUT STRENGTH TRAINING

Derek Lilliquist

Baseball is becoming a specialized sport in which weight training has become an essential element. Athletes are training younger for baseball and they are also playing the game year round. In Florida, we play our high school season and take 2 weeks off. Then we go on to American Legion and play a 40-50 game schedule. After 2 weeks off, we start our fall-winter conditioning program. This consists of lifting weights Monday, Wednesday and Friday. On Tuesday and Thursday, we do a cardiovascular and abdominal workout and then we go to the field. We concentrate on defensive and offensive drills from 3pm –4pm and then sometimes play a 7-9-inning game. We force the kids to play through *normal* stiffness from the weight room. As long as we offer advice as to biomechanical motions, and the fact we know our kids, they are able to lift weights *and* play games with very positive results. We do not want the kids to make mechanical corrections from stiffness. We want them to make adjustments because they are right. The body tends to find the motion that doesn't aggravate the stiff or sore areas (path of least resistance). It is important that we look for that and make corrections.

I would also like to mention that as coaches we must be flexible in areas concerning our kids. This is not an overnight process; *it is a way of life*. They will never forget how to lift weights once they are taught the proper mechanics, the proper breathing and proper schedule to achieve positive results through weight training. With this program we are seeing exceptional gains in speed, power and velocity.

We use three, sometimes four, exercises for each body part we train. A player should not lift his maximum weight. The number of repetitions and the quality of those reps are the most important thing. They are not in the weight room to 'bulk up.' They are there to gain strength and maintain flexibility.

**If your team is not training in the weight room they are going to be left behind.**

(There is a sample strength-training program in our book; "A Coaches Guide To Baseball Excellence.)

## EPILOGUE

**“Baseball is life; all the rest is details.”** I don’t know who is responsible for that quotation. I have seen it here and there and on tee shirts for years. Like many adages, this one is very true. Baseball is such a difficult game to learn to play well and is so involved, that it can take years to become highly skilled. It takes such a huge commitment of time and effort. Baseball players, moms and dads know so well what it takes to travel this difficult, yet rewarding journey. I firmly believe that it is this necessary commitment of time and effort that sets baseball apart from other sports. Just being a great athlete is not enough; many skills, both offensive and defensive must be mastered.

We trust this Coaching Document will help your players develop and improve.

As you read the tables you will become aware of the many skills you can practice with just one drill. For instance- bullpens. There are many skills catchers should practice during each session; throwing the ball back to the pitcher accurately, blocking balls in the dirt, framing and “sticking” pitches, using the different stances, footwork, setting up and moving around on the plate, ankle sway and giving a low target.

Become a student of baseball. Whether it’s a rain day or beautiful sunshine, explore the game and reap its rewards.