

Catching Drills

Framing

Catcher 1 throws softballs from 20 to 30 feet to catcher 2. The balls are thrown high, low, inside, and outside. The balls should be thrown close enough to the "plate" so that foot movement is not necessary. Catchers should practice framing the pitch.

Quick Feet

Catcher 1 throws tennis balls, incrediballs, or softballs from 20 to 30 feet to catcher 2. The balls are thrown inside and outside, high and in the dirt. Catcher 2 takes slide steps to the left and right attempting to get the middle of the body in front of the ball. Catchers should be in full gear.

Quick Release

Catcher squats in proper receiving position for runners on base. She should not be sitting on her heels; upper portion of leg should be parallel to the ground (a must position for those who want to be catchers). Coach or pitcher standing 10-15 ft away should "pitch" ball to catcher (not real pitch. Just go through motion and deliver easy pitch to catcher). Catcher receives ball then "jumps" to a good throwing position. While moving into position to throw, catcher should be bringing both ball and glove together (with ball in glove) to a position that is about chin/ear high and even with her shoulder. Catcher should then practice quick releasing/throwing FROM THIS POSITION! Catcher should make every attempt to throw the ball NO HIGHER THAN THE PITCHER'S HEAD toward ANY base, but especially toward 2nd. For younger players, ball should bounce once or twice on its way to second base. THIS IS PREFERABLE TO THE RAINBOW THROW. It gets to the base quicker and gives the covering infielder a chance to make the catch and tag.

Drill should start with covering infielder standing at second base and learning to catch throws that bounce. As skill with throw increases, drill should then include catcher throwing to the second base bag and the covering infielder moving to catch the ball on the run. Catching the ball on the run is a critical skill for middle infielders. This is a MUST HAVE skill for those wanting to play SS and 2nd because the concept will not change no matter what level they play. Catchers throw to the bag! Fielders move to the ball and make the catch! 12U and above coaches should execute this same drill with those who play 3rd base for the same reason.

Blocking the Ball

Two catchers in full equipment stand about 20 to 30 feet apart. Catcher 1 throws balls in the dirt to the left, right and in front of "home." Catcher 2 practices blocking the wild pitches with shin guards, chest protector and hands using proper foot work technique.

Catcher should be learning to include both hands as part of the blocking process/skill set. They should learn proper glove position i.e. web pointing down and touching the

dirt, the palm of the glove is above the web when blocking. The non-glove hand should be tucked in behind the glove hand, helping to form a “wall” between the catcher’s legs and prevent a ball from getting through the catchers legs/feet. Catcher should not be “slapping” at the ball or attempting to “pick the ball clean” when the ball is pitched in the dirt. The primary objective is for the catcher to **BLOCK** the ball, keeping it in front of her so she can then pick it up to make a play. The vast majority of runners will **NOT** advance to the next base if they see the ball in front of the catcher.

Catchers Fielding Bunts

Put catchers or other fielders at each base. Put six balls in front of home plate. First catcher pops up, fields "bunt" and throws to 1B, 2B, and 3B, in turn, returning to the defensive position after each throw. Repeat second set to each base and then rotate to next catcher. Steal Attempts Place two or more runners with helmets at 1B and 2B. Put two or more shortstops in position with second basemen as backups optional. Put a pitcher on the mound. On the release of the pitch, runner on 1B tries to steal 2B and catcher 1 tries to throw her out. Everyone returns to positions. On the next pitch, runner on 2B tries to steal 3B and catcher 1 tries to throw her out. Repeat several times and then rotate catchers and shortstops.

Tag Play at Home

Place one or more catchers at home and three to six outfielders spaced evenly around the outfield. Give each outfielder one ball. First outfielder rolls ball a few feet in front, picks it up and makes a strong throw to home with catcher 1 simulating a tag; outfielder should end up at the edge of the outfield grass after throw. Catcher then squats facing outfielder and rises to throw ball simulating a long throw to second base. After each outfielder has thrown one ball, catchers rotate. Drill can also be performed with infielders at their positions.

Variation on this theme is to hit the ball to the outfielders and has them practice catching a fly ball and throwing out a runner tagging-up at 3rd or charging a ground ball and throwing home. When practicing with infielders, have the players throw to the front corner of the plate, third base side, knee high. Bounce the ball in if necessary. All infielders should practice this throw multiple times from a drawn-in position. The purpose of this throw location is to protect the catcher from risking injury from an incoming runner while fielding a high throw and just as important, put the ball where the catcher executes the least movement in catching the ball then tagging the runner. This is the best chance for success with this play.

Pick Off Play

Put infielders and pitcher at their positions and 3 or 4 runners at 1B and 3B. Pitcher pitches ball to catcher; on release of pitch, runner on 1B takes aggressive lead while second baseman breaks hard to 1B. Catcher tries to pick off runner. Shortstop covers 2B; runner attempts to dive back to 1B or breaks to 2B and gets into a rundown. Repeat with runner on

3B with shortstop covering. First baseman and third baseman should play well in front of the bag so runners are enticed to take bigger leads. After 4 throws, rotate catchers.

Foul Ball Communication

Put catcher, pitcher, first baseman and third baseman at respective positions. Coach is positioned behind catcher. Coach throws a pop up behind catcher. Infielders call "up 1" if towards 1B, "up 3" if towards 3B, "up" if ball is straight over home, and "back" if ball is straight back. The coach can substitute other calls if desired. Players in infield should point to ball if proper play is for the catcher to make the play.

Cut-Off Communication

Put infielders at their defensive positions. Put three to six outfielders with one ball each, evenly spaced 10 to 20 feet beyond the edge of the outfield grass. Pitcher (or first baseman) moves to cut-off position in front of outfielder 1 who throws ball on a line to home. Catcher yells "cut" and the base number to tell the cut-off to throw to a base (e.g., "cut 2"). Catcher says nothing if she wants the ball to come through. Continue until each outfielder has thrown three balls. Rotate catchers.

Catcher Flip to Home

Put catcher behind plate with six balls evenly spaced at backstop distance. On signal, catcher goes to first ball and flips it to the pitcher or first baseman covering home. Catcher returns to plate and runs down remaining balls in turn. Catcher should retrieve ball with bare hand and flip it in one motion along the ground so the player covering home can apply the tag smoothly. Emphasize pitcher/first baseman's positioning as much as catcher's technique. **Coaches emphasize that if the ball is close to the fence, the catcher should slide on ground to the ball rather than run all the way to the fence.**