

**CATCHER**

## Stance

- Squared - standard
- Staggered - runner might steal (not as good for lateral movement: receive and block)
- Distance from Batter - Front of extended glove is even with the back edge of batter's back foot

## Target

- **Presentation** - rest elbows on knees with hand and glove together; centered between knees
- Move to **receiving position** as pitcher is about to release the pitch; glove elbow pointing to the side (not below the glove)
- **Height - Ankle high**; consider the downward path of the ball from the pitcher. What is the height of the pitch when it crosses the front of home plate?

## Receiving

- Arm extended toward pitcher; maintain slight bend in elbow (don't want the arm locked)

## Blocking

- Hips lead the body
- Catch with body
- Blocking position
  1. **'C' position**: chin tucked down, glove on the ground blocking the '5-hole'
  2. **Torso** slightly bent forward, but remain as Tall as possible
  3. **Body angle turned in 15 degrees** towards home plate

## Throwing (to second base - right hand throwing catcher)

- Hips lead the body out of the stance
- Right foot replaces left foot
- Glove shoulder pointed at second base as

\*\*\* The movement of the hips are the cornerstone of the blocking and throwing actions; the hips lead the movements.

## Most blocking and throwing drill work WITHOUT a ball.

- Blocking - action to blocking position
- Throwing - Footwork

## Stance and Target



(1)

Resting Target



(2)

Receiving Target



(3)

Even Stance



(4)

Staggered Stance



(5)

Too Deep



(6)

Good Depth



(7)



(8)



## Important Points - in reference to the following receiving drills:

1---Catching the ball all the time is not our primary expectation early in the training process, especially with younger/less experienced players. Our (and the player's) first priority is to establish the technical aspects of the body movements that make up the receiving process (actions focus, not results). It is vital that 'success' is judged in terms of technique execution, not a simple 'pass/fail' with regard to catching the ball. After a player develops consistency with the technical points, they'll likely be catching the ball most of the time.

2---The ball is caught in the 'pocket' of the glove, which is at the space between the base of the thumb and pointer finger. The webbing of the glove between the thumb and pointer finger is NOT where we want to catch the ball. The [picture below, on the left](#), is a glove with half of the web missing. It is designed to help a catcher learn to catch the ball in the 'pocket' of the glove

3---Elbow Position, in relationship to the glove, is a critical factor in receiving technique. Coaches want to be constantly aware of the catcher's glove elbow during drills. The elbow remains *outside* the glove when receiving pitches on the glove side of the plate. Elbow is at or above glove height when catching pitches on the throwing hand side of the plate (exception is high pitches). Keep in mind that shoulder strength, initially, makes maintaining proper elbow position a challenge for kids. Increased strength and coordination comes through repetition. Specific points regarding elbow position are addressed throughout this section.

4---Minimal arm movement on pitches within 'framing distance' of the strike zone. Pitches to points further away from the strike zone will most likely be called 'Balls'; framing poor pitches is not a concern ...just do your best to catch the ball. Then throw it back to the pitcher. Most arm movements, prior to receiving the pitch are made at the shoulder joint.

A key component when focusing movements at the shoulder joint is maintaining the height of the elbow and keeping the tip of the elbow pointing out to the side. ([picture below, on the right](#))

(This requires a good amount of strength. It will take younger/smaller kids a while to develop the strength to do this. Keep reminding kids to maintain good elbow position, but stay short of being overbearing.)

5---Delivering the ball in Receiving Drills. Coach makes a 'pre-movement' prior to throwing, which signals the catcher to move from the Resting Position (giving a target with forearms on the knees), to the Receiving Position (glove elbow slightly above knee level).

The 'pre-movement' is the back swing of the arm prior to a delivery using an Underhand Toss technique (recommended). Make a deliberate action of raising the throwing hand up to a throwing position prior to making an Overhand Throw. If throwing overhand is preferable, the coach throws off a knee. This puts the pitch on a realistic angle, and is more accurate.

Tosses need to be ***firm and level***. With a little practice, most will find they can be more accurate tossing underhand ([video](#) - watch 1:23-2:13).



'Half-web' Catcher's Glove



Elbow Points Out

# BLOCKING

**Blocking Position:** a catcher wants to remain as 'big' as possible when blocking the ball:

1. Knees wide apart
2. Butt between heels
3. Glove and throwing hand between knees
  - a. Fingers of the glove pressed slightly into the ground; slightly in front of the palm of the hand
  - b. Throwing hand behind glove
4. Body bent slightly forward at the waist, but remaining vertical and 'tall'
5. Elbows outside the body/torso
6. Chin tucked to the chest; mask facing down

## Notes:

- In this fundamental blocking position, the catcher makes a 'C' shape with the front of their body.
- When landing in a blocking position, the catcher wants their **body/muscles to relax** as much as possible. When the ball hits a relaxed body it 'dies' and lands near the catcher. When the ball hits a tense body, it can bounce quite a bit away. Developing the ability to relax the body when reaching the blocking position takes a bit of time.

## Practice Space

It is not necessary to practice blocking skills at home plate. Foul ground on the first or third base side, or even in the outfield grass, work fine. Draw a plate in the dirt, use a throw down base or something else to represent home plate. In a team practice setting, being comfortable working on catcher skills anywhere on the field allows other members of the team to address their drill needs



**Fundamental Blocking Position**



**Catch the Ball With Your Body**

## Blocking Balls in Front - no ball

### Drill - 5-8x

From the stance, the catcher simply rocks forward onto their knees, landing in a good blocking position. Have the catcher experiment with giving a thrust using their feet, so to land a few inches further forward. The closer the catcher is to the bounce, the less room for an off-line bounce to get past them. - 5x

## Blocking Balls to the Side - no ball

### Drill Objectives

Develop agility and quickness through repetition.

Consistently finishing in a sound blocking position with the body angled slightly in towards home plate - 10-15 degrees ([see pictures and diagram below](#))

### Drill - 10x each side | Repeat

Assuming you are working on a dirt surface. Draw lines, 12" wide of each side of home plate. These indicate the area the catcher is wanting to cover. If working without a home plate, measure a space 17" wide and draw in a home plate.

Work only to one side ....repetitions, then work multiple repetition to the other side.

First couple of workouts make the hip action the exclusive focus of the first 5 repetitions. Then for the next five repetitions, com-



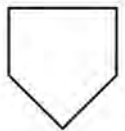
Blocking to the side: 15 degree angle



Lead with hips, push with opposite leg

Catcher in Blocking Position - 15 degree angle

45 degrees



15 degrees



15 degree angle to home plate

### Days 1 & 2

First five each way, hips only; next five combine hips and opposite leg push - **20x total each side**

### Technical checks - blocking position and angle to home plate

Identify one thing to focus on correcting over a series of repetitions. Then change the focus to another aspect to improve on, during the next series of reps. While in the process, also point out things they are doing well.

### Days 3 and Beyond

Combine hip lead and opposite leg push for all repetitions: L 10x | R 10x | repeat

# **COORDINATED TEAM DEFENSE**

## **COORDINATED TEAM DEFENSE - “Baseball is a Game of Movement”**

Many of these drills can be incorporated into the Skill Building Warm-up portion of practice. 'Pitcher Responsibilities, Ball Hit to Infield fits into the Team Drills segment. This could be run with a group of four or group of six, while the other players are running a different drill(s) at a different spot of the field.

### **Foundations**

#### **Three Team Objectives**

**Three Individual Responsibilities** – BBB

**Ball, Base, Back-up**

### **Coordinated Team Defense - The System (Part 1)**

#### **Mini Diamond - Super Tool**

#### **The Catcher's Position**

#### **"I am going to GO GET the Ball"**

**Infield Base Coverage** (INF --- group of FOUR)

**DRILL ...core of the system**

**Backing-up Bases** (OF & P --- group of FOUR)

**DRILL ...core of the system**

### **Managing the Ball**

#### **Moving the Ball on Defense**

#### **The Ball is Constantly Moving**

#### **Two Types of Throws**

#### **Rule —> Runners Not Trying to Advance**

#### **Getting the Ball in to The Pitcher**

**DRILL**

#### **Get the Ball to the Middle of the Diamond**

### **Coordinated Team Defense - The System (Part 2)**

#### **Middle Infielders Movement On Ball Hit To The Outfield**

**DRILL**

#### **SS, 2b, P - Always Move Toward The Ball**

**DRILL**

#### **Pitcher Responsibilities - Ball Hit to the Infield**

**DRILL Series**

### **End of The Play | Transition to Next Batter**

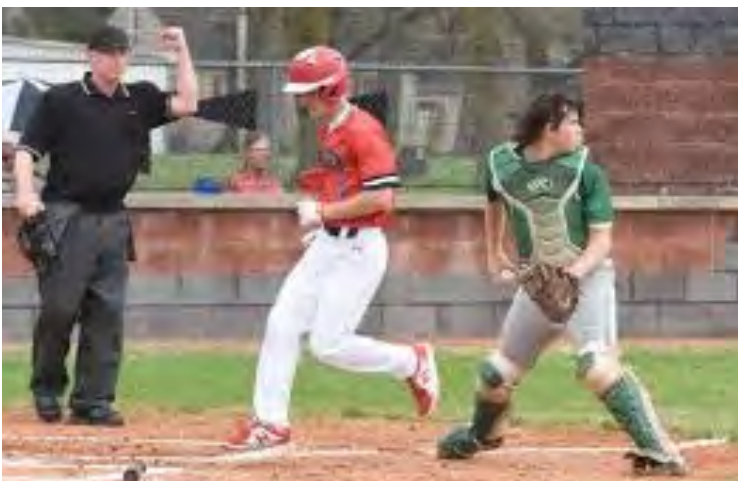
#### **“TIME!”**

#### **Eyes On the Catcher**

#### **Catcher Communication With Fielders**



## Catcher 'Position' is In Front of Home Plate



**BATTING**

## How the Batting Swing Information is Organized

- I. Sequence of actions for the entire swing is outlined - [p.37-51](#)
- II. The sequence of activities for teaching an individual - [p.52](#)
- III. 'No Bat Drills - [p.53](#)

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### **Framework of the Swing**

- Turn, Pull, Snap
- Head in Place | Feet in Place

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### **Sequence of Actions in the Swing**

The following 2 pages outline the swing action from beginning to end. This section is to serve as a reference for understanding, not to be memorized. The 'No Bat' drills ([p.53](#)) train the batter's muscles, piece by piece to execute the swing.

The pictures on [pages 38-50](#) illustrate each aspect of the swing.

## Stance

The most important aspect of the stance is the batter having their **Feet** Wider than then their hips. The in-step of each foot should be, at least, a couple of inches outside the hips.

The hands are held at shoulder height, or a bit higher, and a few inches out away from the shoulder.

The **Wrist** of the top hand should be a 90 degree angle or less. (Some young batters hold the bat with the angle of the top-hand wrists at an angle greater than 90 degrees.) Holding the bat with an acute angle with the top-hand wrist prepares the batter to **Snap** the bat through the ball at contact.

## Turn Back (p.38)

Before swinging, a batter needs to set their legs in position to power the swing. The common term used for the action that prepares the legs is 'Load'. The loading action: front leg/front side of body **Turns** In slightly and the batter shifts their weight slightly **Back** to their back leg.

This action is an absolute must. The leg turn starts the sequence of movements in the swing and sets the legs in position to power the swing. [Batting is like jumping](#). To jump as high as possible, a person first squats down. To swing as powerfully as possible, a batter needs to first Turn Back

## Turn Fast (p.39)

The Legs (lower half) make the first movement of the swing. A batter wants to turn their legs as fast as possible. This action maximizes power, bat speed and is the first of two keys to swing accuracy\* ([p.48](#)).

## Switch Heels (p.40)

When the batter Turns Back, the front heel comes up off the ground. The Leg Turn is activated by the front heel pushing **Back and Down**. While the front heel goes down the back heel Turns Up. This Switch Heels action applies pressure against the hip girdle forcing the turn of the hips and legs.

The small percentage of batters who Stride ([p.51](#)) land their stride with their toe on the ground and their heel up. In most cases they are initiating the 'Back and Down' action of the front foot while landing the stride.

## Anchor (p.41)

This action involves the Back Leg. During the Switch Heels action, while the back heel Turns Up, the muscles of the back leg press straight down against the back knee, to straighten the batter up. The result is a 'stacked' posture: head, shoulders, hips, back knee, aligned vertically. In addition to maximizing leg power, the anchoring action prevents the torso from 'drifting' forward during the swing.

## Sideways Karate Chop (p.42)

The action a batter makes to deliver the bat to the ball (Contact Point - [p.43](#)) is a Sideways Karate Chop with the Top-Hand Arm. A Karate Chop is executed with a bent elbow. The batter's elbow leads the Sideways Karate Chop action. The elbow, which is bent when the bat is held in the stance, moves in a straight line along side the torso when executing this action.

## Skip-a-Rock (p.44)

At the completion of the Sideways Karate Chop action, the palm of the top hand is facing up, as it would be if a person were preparing to skip a rock. The top-hand wrist then snaps straight forward, accelerating the barrel of the bat through the ball. The energy of this wrist snap continues in a straight line forward until the top-hand arm is **extended in a straight line** ([p.45](#)). The same path the hand and arm following when skipping a rock.



## Batting - Turn Back (Load)





## Legs Initiate Swing the Swing — Legs Work Before the Hands



## Switch Heels (Drill #2) Videos

The first videos show pro players executing the Switch Heels action. The third video illustrates a US Soldier using the same action. We are teaching/learning Body Mechanics, not 'secret' baseball/softball stuff.

### Switch Heels - Videos: Pujols, Zunino, About Face

A fundamental action in the swing is to 'Switch Heels'. All batters, when initiating their swing, drive their front heel back and down. While this takes place, their back heel turns up.

The result of these combined actions is energy from the legs pressing against the hip girdle, forcing rotation of the Lower Half of the body (legs). Many of us have heard the phrase 'turn the hips' in relation to the batting swing. The turning the hips begins with this action of the heels.

There are a few batters where it may be difficult to see this action in the front foot/heel. Some have a more- subtle movement. In those swings the rotation and driving back against the front hip takes place in ankle and knee joints (which have some laxity and capability to rotate).

Regarding the small percentage of batters who stride, there are two ways they execute the 'heel drop' in the front foot. Some rotate the heel back just before landing the stride; others finish their stride on their big toe, then drive the front heel back and down from there.

The first two videos below illustrate the 'Switch Heels' action used by Albert Pujols and Mike Zunino. The third video shows a soldier doing an 'About Face'. The soldier employs the same technique as the batters to turn his legs and body. The purpose of including the third video is point out that this action is not something unique to swinging a baseball or softball bat; this action is basic body mechanics.

#### Albert Pujols - Front Heel / Switching Heels - **Three examples: 0:00, 0:38, 1:35**

- Up to load ("Turn Back") Back and Down ("Turn Fast")
- Front heel (foot) initiates lower half turn

**Note** that Mr. Pujols has little or no stride; and minimal upper body movement until after the conclusion of the turn of his legs.

#### Mike Zunino - 2 HRs - **Three examples: 0:00-0:13, 0:14-0:20, 0:30-0:35**

(watch front heel; same as Pujols (and every batter to some degree ...and our US Army Soldier)

#### 'About Face'

Example of a soldier using the same technique as Pujols and Zunino to turn his legs. This video is included to point out that what we are teaching isn't some 'secret' action exclusive to the baseball/softball swing. We want the coaches and players to gain an awareness of how the human body moves to initiate the action of the swing and most efficiently generates power in the swing. The soldier, Albert and Mike are each using the same technique to turn their lower body as effectively as possible ...they "Switch Heels".

...only need to watch the **first 10 seconds** of the video.



**Anchor** - Centered, Tall, Stacked





## Sideways Karate Chop - snap rubber bands





**Contact Point** - approximately even with the front foot





## Batting - Skip-a-Rock

Top hand palm remains 'facing up' through contact with the ball, as the top hand wrist is snapping the barrel of the bat through the ball. This is the same action and positioning of the hand just after release when skipping a rock.



In each of the above pictures the ball has already been contacted and is leaving the bat.



## Extension (straight line)



The three major points, of the sequence of actions described on the previous page, are:

**Legs —> Elbow —> Wrist**

Legs Turn to initiate the swing

Elbow leads the Sideways Karate Chop (and the barrel of the bat) to Contact Point\*

Wrist snaps the barrel of the bat through Contact Point\*

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## **Bottom Hand** aspect of the swing

### **‘Half Way’ (p.47)**

Regarding physical action, the bottom hand plays a small role. The ‘Pull’ of the bottom hand is approximately 6”, then it is done.

For reference, we’ll call the center of the chest, The Sternum, the ‘Half Way’ point. The pulling of the bottom hand should, in fact, stop prior to reaching the sternum. The action of the bottom hand stops somewhere between the back armpit and the sternum.

For instruction purposes we say ‘Half Way’. This is a simple concept for the kids to follow. It also ties in with our instruction of what the top hand does in the swing. The top hand goes ‘All the Way’ (skip-a-rock action)

## **Key Points of How the Bottom Hand Works in the Swing**

### **Sets the Direction of the Swing**

The knob of the bat (Bottom Hand) directs the path of the swing: high or low; location on the plate: inside, middle, outside.

### **Works in Conjunction with the Sideways Karate Chop (p.42)**

The action of the bottom hand ‘Pull’ and the top-hand elbow leading the Sideways Karate Chop work at the same time.

### **Hinge (p.47)**

The most important aspect of the bottom hand’s role in the swing is it works as a **Hinge**. After the bottom hand complete its Pull action of approximately 6”, it ‘stops’. At that point the actions of the top hand work to accelerate the swing using the bottom-hand Hinge:

- Completion of the Sideways Karate Chop; taking the barrel of the bat **to** Contact Point
- Skip-a-Rock action of the top hand snapping the barrel of the bat **through** Contact Point

## **The Swing**

Legs —> Elbow —> Wrist (top hand) >>> Bottom Hand is the **Hinge** for the Legs and Top Hand aspects of the swing.



Bottom Hand 'Half-Way'



## The Swing - Additional Points

### Face The Ball (Keep Your Eye on the Ball?) - p.49

How effective is the phrase, “Keep your eye on the ball”? It is stated often, but do we see young batter improve their head control and tracking of the ball to Contact Point?

Let’s try replacing that statement with the phrase ‘**Face the Ball**’. The eyes are in the front of the face. If a batter ‘Faces the Ball’, their eyes are directed at the ball. Also, the face is a part of the head. If a batter ‘Faces the Ball’ they are more likely to limit the movement of their head.

### Feet in Place (Balance) - p.50

Watch a pro batter complete their swing. During the high stress environment of a game, on most swings, batters complete their swing, even when they are fooled or swing at a bad pitch, they complete their swing with their feet in place and balanced. Watch pro batters during batting practice; nearly 100% of their swings are completed with their feet in place.

### \*The Legs Play a Major Role in Swing Accuracy

The muscles of the body work like **rubber bands**. Each movement the body makes, the muscles stretch out, then snap back. The more we stretch a rubber band, the faster and more **accurately** it snaps.

The faster a batter turns their legs, the more the rubber bands (muscles) through their torso stretch. Those rubber bands ‘attach’ to the top-hand-arm’s elbow. Those stretched rubber bands snap the Sideways Karate Chop action, and the bat, **accurately** to Contact Point.

The faster the Leg Turn, along with a full-speed snap of the Sideways Karate Chop, results in a more **accurate** ‘swing’. ...when a batter keeps their **Head in Place** and they **Face the Ball**.

### **Maintain a Constant for Each Swing is a Key for Developing Timing**

A batter develops their timing quicker by having a **Constant**. The one thing a batter can do the same (Constant) on each swing is to execute it **full speed**. Turn the legs as fast as possible and swing as fast as possible; **100%** each time. Any speed less than 100% is going to be different from one swing to the next. Without that Constant, a batter has no basis from which to adjust their timing.



## Head in Place - Face the Ball at Contact





Feet in Place - Balance | No Careful Swings (full speed every time - 100%)

