

# RFYBO Catching Guidelines

\* Look for the vocal leader who's not afraid to "direct traffic" \*

## STANCE

When in the catching stance, you should be in a **comfortable crouch, compact and relaxed**. Move your entire body to the location of the desired pitch, with your **off-hand behind your back**. Any time there is a threat of a runner stealing, your right foot should be a little behind the left (left heel to right toes), backside up, and the off-hand should be in a **tight fist behind the glove**.

When receiving the ball, be strong and smooth. Extend your arm and show the umpire the ball. Roll your wrists toward the center of the plate.

## SETUP

Move to the location of the pitch as the pitcher begins his motion and not before. Get your glove up and give the pitcher a target as early as possible. Target the bottom of the zone of a called pitch unless the call is for a high pitch in which case the target will be the top of the zone.

## SIGNALING

When signaling, you need to **conceal the signals** as you relay them to the pitcher. To do this, your legs should be kept closed, and protect the signs with the glove-hand hanging below the glove side knee. Your signal hand must also be kept in your crotch and not dangling below.

**Signaling must be clear.** Spread your fingers when giving signals. When communicating #2 or #3, use fingers that are separated rather than ones directly next to one another for easier viewing.

Also remember there are other ways of signaling. You do not have to use your fingers to relay the signs, a touch system or glove position system works just as well. Always allow the pitcher to give input.

## FRAMING

When framing, you need to extend your arm, go get the ball, and **hold the ball for the umpire to see**. Roll your wrists toward the plate, but don't pull the ball. Roll and extend in a smooth manner and avoid jerking or snapping the glove. Only frame on strikes and borderline strikes. If the ball is outside the zone, just catch it and throw it back to the pitcher.

On low pitches, roll your wrists upwards. It is important to **give the umpire a good view**. The catcher and the umpire need to work together.

## BLOCKING

When blocking a baseball it is important to get both knees on the ground as quickly as possible. Do not hop up and then hit the ground. Put your glove back against your cup with your fingers down. Do not put your hand on the ground because this will create a ramp for the ball to hit and continue in a forward motion. You want to create a barrier for the ball to bounce off.

The shoulders should be kept square to the ball. The eyes are fixed, tracking the ball from where it hit the ground to the point where it hits the catcher on the chest. As soon as you feel the impact of the ball you must pop back up into the catching position and then immediately fetch the ball. Use the scoop method (two hands) to gather in the ball.

### PLAYS AT HOME

When making a tag play at home, your left leg goes on the corner of the plate with the toe aimed towards third base. You need to take away the front half of home and give the backside.

Your **legs need to be bent** but the **knees should not be locked**. Your left knee should be aimed at the runner. Stay low and **catch the ball with two hands**. You can protect the ball with your off-hand. In a swiping motion, bring the ball in low, pivot and drop the right knee and shoulders. With a continued swiping motion, graze the player, come up and show the ball. *Remember, the catcher can take some impact, but should also give it.*

### FIELDING BUNTS

When fielding bunts, **you need to always use two hands and scoop the ball**. Don't try to pick it up. When the ball is down the first base line or up the middle, circle the ball and overstep it. The ball should be between your legs. Scoop the ball with your body angled towards first base. Next, step back from the baseline and throw the ball to the inside or the outside part of the bag, which ever is communicated.

If the ball is down the third base line, you need to come around it with your back towards first base and overstep, to scoop the ball with your body angled toward first base.

### FIELDING POP-UPS

When fielding pop-ups, you need to find the ball and **remove your mask**, keeping it in hand, and turn back to the infield. Next, get under the ball and throw your mask away. You must **call the ball at the point of climax**. As the catcher, you need to remember that infielders have priority over the catcher on pop-ups because it is easier for them to catch.

### HOLDING RUNNERS ON

As the catcher, you need to keep runners off balance. You need to be **accurate, quick and strong**. You need to be able to make snap throws. It is important to make the runners think. To hold runners on, the catcher must always communicate with infielders on pick-offs.

### BEING A LEADER

As the catcher, **you are the field general**. You must be loud and direct. You always need to know the situation and direct others to act appropriately. You anchor the team from behind the plate. **You must be the leader.**

**Catching is by far the most difficult and challenging position to play.** Moreover, a catcher must realize that this position requires more than just physical skills. It also requires a catcher, to have 'leadership skills because they are an extension of the coach on the diamond. A wise person once said, "**If it were easy everyone would do it.**" Well catching is certainly not something everyone can do.

# BLOCKING DRILLS

Catching is the most demanding position on the field and the most overlooked during practice. Catchers are often taken for granted as coaches spend time doing drills for hitting, improving defense, and pitching. Success in baseball depends on the team's strength up the middle, with the catcher as the starting point. And, the most important and toughest skill that a catcher has to learn is **BLOCKING**. The key to mastering blocking skills is practice. It takes much hard work to improve, but the more time you put in, the better you will be.

## **Shadow Blocking (No ball)**

Coach stands behind the catcher. Catcher assumes his stance. The coach tells the catcher what pitch is thrown and where. The coach will give the catcher a few seconds to get ready. When the coach claps their hands, the catcher will assume the blocking position and hold. The coach or other players will check their form to make sure the catcher is in a good position. The drill can be varied by giving the catcher less time between pitch and location and the clap, or the catcher will go on verbal commands only.

## **Sit and Get Hit**

Coach gets on one knee from a short distance. The catcher assumes the blocking position with his upper body in a "C" position. The coach will throw the ball in the dirt and off the chest or mask of the catcher. The catcher learns the feeling of balls coming off his body (harmless) and learns to position himself correctly so that the ball drops to the ground in front of him..

## **Toss to the Dirt**

Coach stands on the mound. The catcher assumes their stance. Coach will throw balls in the dirt and the catcher will block, retrieve, and get their body in a position to throw.

**Lift and Drive** Side-to-side blocking using small steps and progressing into larger "lift and drive." When the ball is to the left, lift and drive with the right leg, always keeping shoulders square towards the field and keeping the ball in front. When the ball is to the right, lift and drive with the left leg. (Coach throws the ball 10 times to each side while standing half-way between the mound and home plate.).

## **Up-Downs**

Lay out five balls five feet apart. The catcher will shuffle to each ball, assume the blocked position, get up and shuffle to the next ball. The object is to work on quickness down to the ball and up from the ball. Make sure the catcher's hands are moving in the correct position on the way up. The drill can be varied by having the catcher not only go down all five, but moving to the other side and returning to where they started.

## **Hands Drill**

The catcher should start in the down position with a ball placed in front of them. When the coach says go, the catcher fires their hands out to the side and away from the ball, gets to their feet quickly, rakes in the ball and gets their body in a position to throw the baseball.

## **Zone Blocking**

Acceptable activity for when practice is getting monotonous and the catchers need a change of pace. Assign three zones and points for each (5, 3, -5). The first zone should be 3 feet by 3 feet starting at the catcher's feet, the second zone should be 5 feet by 5 feet starting at the catcher's feet, the third zone is anything outside zone two. Catcher assumes stance while the coach stands on the mound. The coach will throw balls in the dirt. The catcher should block, retrieve the balls in a zone and then get their body in a position to throw. Each catcher gets an established number of trials. Add up points and assign a winner.

## **Batting Practice**

There is no substitute for blocking live during an established period of time during batting practice. This prevents the catcher from sitting back and creating bad habits during batting practice.

## **Bullpens**

The bull pen should be utilized not only by pitchers preparing to enter the game, but also by catchers as well. The catcher should report to the bullpen in full gear and have their game face on. No balls should ever get by a catcher in the bullpen. Take pride in your abilities.

# **FIELDING BUNTS DRILLS**

- **Rolling The Ball**

Coach stands behind catcher and simulates bunt by rolling ball down first or third baselines or directly in front of catcher.

An added variety to this drill has the coach calling the base to which the catcher is to throw. This makes the catcher react to the call.

- **Over The Shoulder Toss**

Catcher assumes his stance. Coach stands behind the catcher with a ball. The coach tosses the ball over the catcher's shoulder. The catcher will field it and throw it to a *designated* base.

- **Three Balls**

Place one ball near the first base line, one up the middle, and one near the third base line. Catcher assumes his stance. Coach stands behind the catcher and calls out which ball to field.

- **Runners Running**

With runners standing at home and first base, the coach (who is behind the catcher) performs an *Over The Shoulder Toss*. The runners take off when the ball hits the ground. Catcher fields the bunt, decides which runner to throw out, and makes throw. Award 1 point to defense if runner is thrown out at first; award 2 points to defense if runner is thrown out at second. {Offense earns 1 point for reaching second safely and one-half point for reaching first safely. Which ever "side" earns 5 points first wins.}

# **DROPPED 3<sup>RD</sup> STRIKE DRILLS**

Coach stands behind catcher who assumes a normal crouch position. Coach will roll ball to different places behind catcher and will then yell "ball"! Catcher must go into blocking position then come up quickly, locate the ball, and throw to first base. The first baseman will read the location of the ball and will call 'inside' for a ball to the left of the first baseline or 'outside' for a ball to the right of the baseline. If this drill is practiced often enough it will virtually eliminate a catcher panicking on a dropped 3rd strike.

Another variation of this drill has a runner on 3rd base (less than two outs). The catcher looks the runner back to 3rd, delivers the throw to first, then positions himself for a throw back to the plate. Baserunner decides if he should attempt to go home.

# THROWING ACCURACY DRILLS

- **Bullet to the Box**

A catcher's throw to second base should not only be timely, but accurate as well. A cardboard box (14"Wx20"H) perched on second base is an excellent target for throws. A catcher should be able to put a *bullet into the box* every time. Five throws and then change catchers. A partner (the alternate catcher) can stand behind second to field errant throws. Two cardboard boxes, one at home and one at second base, can keep two catchers practicing for hours.

- **Hit the Helmet**

A nice drill at the very end of practice when catchers are tired (same situation during games when base stealers run rampant). Place a batting helmet on second base. Catcher has the ball and jump pivots and throws to second to try and hit the helmet. If he misses he retrieves the ball and tries again. If he hits the helmet, he's done for the day.  
(Note: After 3 failures the drill is over.)

# FRAMING DRILLS

- **Shadow**

Catcher starts out in his stance. Coach holds a ball in front of the catcher and moves it around the strike zone. The catcher follows the path of the baseball and frames the area. The catcher should work on body movement and catching the ball in halves.

- **One Knee Toss**

Coach gets on one knee five to ten feet from the catcher. The coach will toss a ball to the catcher. The catcher works on body movement and catching the ball in halves. The benefit of this approach is that the coach is close enough so he can be more accurate with his toss and work all areas.

- **Medium Toss**

Coach stands up and throws pitches to a catcher from 40-50 feet. This allows the catcher to track the ball from a longer distance. The catcher still works on body movement and catching the ball in halves.

- **Catching Batting Practice and Bullpens**

This is as close to a live game situation as a catcher can experience. It is very important that a catcher not just go through the motions when catching batting practice or a bullpen. This must be a highly intense environment and must be taken seriously. Frame the pitches that must be framed. In other words, batting practice and bullpen work can be the best drill for framing.

# THROWING DRILLS

- **Catcher with the Ball**

The catcher starts out with the ball in his glove. Coach will be in front of the catcher. The coach will instruct the catcher to use either load and throw or jump pivot. The catcher will execute the footwork and throw to a partner. Make sure to work both methods of throwing footwork.

- **One Knee Partner/Coach Toss**  
Catcher at home plate. Partner or coach a few feet in front on one knee. Partner or coach will toss ball to catcher who is already in his stance. The catcher will catch the ball and execute proper throwing footwork and throw to another partner. Being on one knee and tossing the ball will allow the partner or coach to put the ball exactly where he wants to work. Also, this will assist the catcher in working on both types of throwing footwork.
- **Medium/Full Toss**  
Coach will stand half-way or on the mound and throw pitches to the catcher who has already assumed his stance. The catcher will execute footwork determined by the pitch and throw to a partner behind the coach.
- **Around The Horn**  
During a game with the bases empty, it is common practice on a third strike for the catcher to start an *Around The Horn* series of throws. This is an excellent opportunity for the catcher to use one of the throwing footwork techniques for tosses to third base. For the best practice, the catcher should begin the throw immediately after the strike is called, while the batter is still in the box.

## SIGN GIVING DRILLS

- **Mirror Drill**  
Catcher gives signs in front of a mirror. The catcher will be able to see what the pitcher sees. This gives the catcher an idea of how easy or difficult the signs are to read.
- **Practice Setting**  
When catchers are working on other skills, have them go through the entire sequence of events, starting with sign giving. This gives the coach, or partner, an opportunity to witness and critique any problems.
- **Saying The Sign**  
At practice, perhaps during batting practice, have the catcher give the signs and have the pitcher say out loud the kind of pitch and the location. After a few times, have them switch to alternate signs. Between pitcher and catcher, the fine tuning of leg openings and fingers and glove hand will take place. In addition, the batter can be looking for a specific kind of pitch to quickly adjust his swing.

## CATCHING TIPS

- **Popup Physics**  
Catchers should turn their backs to the playing field when catching pop flies. The ball naturally comes back to the playing field, so turning the back to the field makes catching these pop flies a lot easier.
- **Bad Pitches - Body Positions**
  - **Not too far away** - Keep the feet planted and move the body toward the ball
  - **Clearly away** - Take one step toward the ball
  - **High Pitches** - Glove is angled DOWN above the pitch
  - **Low Pitches near the body** - Drop to the knees, body square to the pitch, hand in middle of body, the chest square to the pitch, the chin tucked into the chest, the shoulders forward
  - **Low Pitches Away from the body** - Step to the side of the ball, drop the opposite knee to the ground, hands to the space between the knees and the foot.