

# **Baseball Catchers Guide**

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# Guide Intro

One area in baseball that receives little attention from coaches is teaching proper catching techniques. In general, there is not enough practice time devoted to it and the result is a lack of quality catchers at all levels. The reasons for this can be attributed to a number of things, but mainly, the blame falls on coaches for not setting aside practice time and a coach's lack of catching knowledge.

The following guide is for beginning and experienced catchers and coaches. Visual aids are provided to clarify key concepts and provide examples of correct techniques. A list of key terms and phrases is also provided at the end of each section to review the important points covered in that section. You will find some advanced tips here as well.



## Catcher's Stance

A proper stance is fundamentally important to being a good catcher. There are two basic stances to learn, a relaxed stance and a ready stance.

### Relaxed Stance

A general stance most catchers use with the bases empty and less than two strikes is called a "relaxed" stance. The relaxed stance begins by squatting with your feet shoulder-width apart. Your hips and shoulders should be square to the pitcher and your feet straight across or slightly (an inch or two) staggered. In other words, when looking down at home plate your feet should be parallel with the front edge of the plate (i.e. straight across). Your weight should be on the insides of your feet and you must be balanced. Balance is key. You should not be falling over and it should be difficult for someone to push you over. Get as low as comfortably possible while still being in an athletic position ready to react to anything. The purpose of getting low is to allow the umpire to clearly see and call

pitches in the lower half of the zone. Every catcher is different so you should experiment and find a stance that is comfortable and balanced.

Setting a proper arm position and arm angle are important. Your receiving arm (mitt hand) should be relaxed (somewhere near the middle of being completely straight and being completely bent toward your chest) and your palm should be pointed at the pitcher. DO NOT set up with your receiving arm straight or you may interfere with the batter's swing (catcher's interference). DO NOT have your arm totally bent, as this will slow your ability to react to wild pitches. Being extended or completely bent will also hamper your ability to receive and frame pitches. Your elbow should be below your mitt. This helps in framing pitches that are low and to the left side of your body (your elbow has less distance to travel to get around the pitch). For right-handed catchers (most catchers are right handed), your throwing hand should be behind your right shoe to avoid being hit by a fouled pitch. I even like to stick my thumb in the back of my shoe.

## Present a Good Target

Present the pitcher with a good target. Your mitt should be held just above your knees or the knees of the batter. Your mitt should not obstruct your vision. A good rule of thumb is to provide your pitcher with a target as soon as he begins his windup. If the pitcher is in the stretch position, present a target after you give your sign. You may have to adjust this depending on how quickly the pitcher delivers to the plate. As the pitcher delivers, you can relax your wrist. This is more comfortable and will allow you to react quicker than with a tense wrist. As you catch the ball, firm up your wrist so the ball doesn't drag your mitt backwards. Remember your arm position and set a good target!!!



**KEYS:** Square to Pitcher, Comfort, Balance, Low Athletic Position, Arm Position, Palm Toward Pitcher, Target, Relaxed Stance

*Advanced Tip:* *Drop your left knee slightly to allow for a greater range of motion with your receiving arm. This way your knee does not interfere with the movement of your arm and you can more easily frame a pitch down and in on a right handed hitter.*

## Ready Stance

The ready stance is used when there are runners on base and/or two strikes on the batter. In both cases you need to be ready to block a wild pitch or quickly throw out a base runner.

The ready stance is simply a raised squat where the weight is now on the balls of your feet instead of the instep and your butt is *slightly* raised. This allows for quick reactions. Even though you are raised, keep low in your stance. Remember the umpire. Give your pitcher as much help as possible by allowing the umpire to see the entire zone. The distance between your feet will probably increase in a raised squat position. This is fine and expected.



## Slightly Stagger Your Feet

One area where I see bad information being passed along is foot alignment. Foot alignment is very important in a ready stance. Your feet should be SLIGHTLY staggered. DO NOT stagger your feet more than a few inches from parallel. Some coaches teach their players to "cheat" with their feet over staggered. This is BAD and here's why. The reason coaches teach their players to over stagger their feet is to help in throwing out runners attempting to steal. This may help them set their feet quicker but it takes away from the catcher's ability to block wild pitches. Lining up in an extremely staggered stance forces the hips and the shoulders to NOT BE SQUARE to the pitcher. It is much harder for a catcher to turn his body and successfully block a pitch in the dirt. It is even harder to block a pitch in the dirt to either side of the catcher. A runner attempting to steal is trying to EARN that base and a catcher still has a great shot at throwing out the runner without cheating with his feet. Almost all bases are stolen off the pitcher, not the catcher. A runner on base will benefit from a catcher who is out of position (staggered feet) and is unable to block a ball in the dirt. **Make the offense earn the base and do not give it away by being out of position.**

**GENERAL BASEBALL RULE:** keys to winning baseball games - Making the opposing team earn bases and not giving away bases.

**IMPORTANT POINT:** Keep your hips and shoulders square to the pitcher and slightly stagger your feet!

Arm position and angle should be the same for both ready and relaxed stances. Arm position should be midway between a fully extended arm and a completely bent arm. The level of your elbow should still be below your mitt level.

## Throwing Hand Behind Mitt

The throwing hand in the ready stance is directly behind the mitt in a fist. The throwing hand should not be touching the mitt but very close to it. Your hand will be safe from foul tips in this position. Having your throwing hand behind the mitt and NOT behind your shoe facilitates a quicker transition of the ball from your mitt to your throwing hand. This serves mainly as a method of finding the proper grip on the ball, which aids in throwing out runners attempting to steal. Also, with your hand behind your mitt, it is easier and quicker to get into the proper blocking position, which will be discussed in a later section.

**KEYS:** Ready Stance, Hips and Shoulders Square to Pitcher, Weight on Balls of Feet, Low Athletic Position, Arm Position, Palm Toward Pitcher, Target, Fist Behind Glove

## Catcher's Set Up

Now that you have a solid stance, you need to learn where to position yourself in the catchers box in relation to the hitter. The catchers box is 8' long by 43" wide and is located directly behind home plate. The rules of baseball state that the catcher must have both feet inside or on the line of this box at the time of a pitch.

## Relation to the Hitter

Where does the catcher set up in relation to the hitter? On many occasions, I have seen catchers set up too far behind the hitter. This is a BAD HABIT. Ideally, you want to be as far forward toward home plate as possible without your mitt interfering with a batter's swing. The closer you can get toward your pitcher the easier you make it for the pitcher to hit his locations (shorter distance to throw the ball) and also you provide the umpire with a better opportunity to make accurate ball and strike calls. \*KNOW YOUR HITTER: Certain hitters have a looping swing (especially at the younger ages). You need to set up a little further back than normal for these hitters or they will tip your mitt with their bat during a swing. This is catcher's interference. If you are unsure how close to set up to the batter, play it safe and stay back a little.

## When to Set Up

Do not set up too early after giving your sign. This gives away pitch location. Opposing coaches will relay this information to the hitter or the hitter may peek back to see where you are sitting. Knowing pitch location helps a hitter. If the pitcher is in the windup, set up just as the pitcher is starting his windup. If the pitcher is in a stretch position use your judgment. You should move just before the pitcher is delivering the ball to the plate.

**KEYS:** Be Forward, Catcher's Interference, Know the Hitter, Never Down the Middle, Off the Plate, Umpire's Zone

## Count and Pitch Type

The count on the batter and the type of pitch thrown affects where a catcher needs to set up. The target you present to your pitcher should almost always (a few exceptions) be directly in the middle of your body and just above your knees or the knees of the hitter. **Never set up directly down the middle of home plate.** I don't care if the count on the hitter is three balls and no strikes. Set up just off the middle, maybe an inch or two. In general...if the pitcher is behind in the count, set up to cover more of the plate. If the pitcher is equal or ahead in the count, work further from the middle of the plate or even off the plate.

### Fastballs

Fastball can be thrown in any part of the strike zone in any count. Very rarely do you want to see a fastball thrown down the MIDDLE of the plate. As a hitter, you should know most hitters have a high success rate hitting fastballs down the middle of the plate. This is why you should work the corners of the plate when throwing fastballs. Get to know the umpire's strike zone. Most umpires will expand the true strike zone a few inches. By the end of the first inning, you should have a good idea of an umpire's zone. Use this to your advantage when setting up. If an umpire is calling strikes on pitches that are 6 inches out of the zone, set up to take advantage of this. Remember the general rule...if the pitcher is behind in the count, set up to cover more of the plate. If the pitcher is equal or ahead in the count, work further from the middle or even off the plate.

### Breaking Balls

When a pitcher is throwing a breaking ball early in the count he is most likely trying to get that pitch over for a strike. It is important for the pitcher to get ahead of the hitter. As a catcher you need set up to cover more of the plate to allow the pitch a greater chance of catching part of the strike zone. If your pitcher is ahead

in the count, he may want to throw a breaking pitch that starts in the zone and then drop/curves out of it. On these occasions you should set up more to the corners and/or be ready to block a pitch in the dirt with two strikes on the hitter or with runners on base. On occasions where a right-handed pitcher is facing a left-handed hitter (or vice versa), a breaking ball may be thrown down and in. Again though, the object is to get the hitter to chase a pitch out of the zone and you need to be ready to block it.

## Change Ups

Change Ups are one of the most effective pitches in a pitcher's arsenal. Hitting is timing and changing speeds throws off a hitter's timing. This does not mean you can set up down the middle or near the middle of the plate with this pitch. It is easier for hitters to recognize a change up that is UP in the hitting zone and the results are usually not good for the pitcher. Change ups should be thrown on the corners or off the plate and low in the zone. Most change ups will be thrown away from a hitter meaning to the outside. Set up on the corner or off the plate and provide your pitcher with a good low target. On rare occasions change ups will be thrown down and in on a hitter if the pitcher has a good sinking action to the pitch.

## 0-2: A special count that needs mentioning

On a zero ball and two strike count the pitcher is in command. He has a number of options available and it is up to you or your coaches to decide what to do. Your first option is to go right at the hitter. Do not waste any pitches. Usually, to be successful with this option, you need to have a pitcher on the mound that throws exceptionally hard or has a very nasty out pitch (which you may have to block). Going at the hitter means the pitch will be in the hitting zone. Your second option is to throw a waste pitch. A waste pitch is both off the plate and away from the hitter or a pitch that bounces in the dirt in which the hitter has no chance of hitting solid. There are multiple reasons to throw a waste pitch: To try and get the hitter to chase a bad pitch, to show the hitter a different pitch than what he's seen so far, and to set up your next pitch or series of pitches. Your third option with an O-2 count is to bust the hitter up and in on his hands. You will not literally hit the batter in the hands. The purpose of this is to brush the hitter off the plate so he is not diving into the outside pitches, to change the batter's eye level which makes it harder to hit, and also, to set up your next pitch away from the hitter. This is one of the rare instances where the catcher will move his target to a position up and in on the hitter. This will let the pitcher know where his target is. DO NOT leave your glove there the entire time, only long enough so the pitcher can visualize his target.

## A Wild Pitcher

Pitchers sometimes have off days where nothing they throw is near the plate. Sometimes they might be having trouble throwing one of their pitches for strikes. In these situations it is sometimes necessary for the catcher to set up more toward the middle of the plate no matter what the count. Once a pitcher re-establishes his control (if he does) you can start moving further from the middle or off the plate.

**KEYS:** Be Forward, Catcher's Interference, Know the Hitter, Never Down the Middle, Off the Plate, Umpire's Zone

## Receiving Proper Receiving Techniques for a Catcher

Receiving is simply catching the ball. A good catcher will make receiving look effortless. You need to have soft hands, but at the same time be firm with your wrist and arm as you catch the ball. Look the pitch all the way into your mitt. Your glove should not move unless you want to move it.

## Stick the Strike

If a pitcher throws a pitch that you KNOW is going to be a strike, stick the pitch. A phrase I was taught and use repeatedly with my catchers is, "stick the strike." This means that your glove should not move in any direction (except a little back) after you catch the pitch. Hold the pitch where you caught it, BRIEFLY, then throw it back to the pitcher. For pitches low in the zone or breaking balls, sticking the strike is especially important. Catchers have a tendency to drop their glove in a downward movement after having caught a low or downward moving pitch. This is a bad habit and could cost your pitcher a called strike. Keep the ball in the strike zone. Stick It!

## Beat the Pitch to the Spot

Another phrase I use with my catchers that helps them with their receiving is "beat the pitch." As you are tracking the pitch with your eyes, you should have a good idea where the pitch will cross the plate and where you will catch it. With your mitt, beat the pitch to that spot. This will allow you to "stick" that pitch and the momentum of your glove is stopped. Stopping your downward glove momentum aids your ability to stick the low strike. DO NOT track the pitch with your mitt.

## High and Low Pitches

A general rule for catching pitches that are high in the zone and borderline strikes/balls is to catch them as far back into your body as possible. Every pitch has downward movement, even fastballs. By catching a high pitch further back into your body you allow the pitch to drop. This provides the illusion of a strike that the umpire may call in your favor. This trick is especially useful with breaking balls.

For pitches low in the zone, which are borderline strikes/balls, you want to almost attack them. Extend your arm to catch them while they are still in the strike zone. You need to be careful so your mitt does not interfere with the batter's swing. Also, you do not want to fall forward off your base.

Remember for these low pitches: beat the pitch to the spot and then stick it. By applying these simple tricks for high and low pitches, you will get more strike calls for your pitcher.

**KEYS:** Soft Hands, Firm Arm and Wrist, Stick Strikes, Beat the Pitch

## Framing

Framing is the art of making a pitch that is near (border line strike/ball) the zone appear to be a strike when in fact it may not be. A catcher, who can frame well, can be extremely helpful to a pitcher working the corners of the plate. Framing correctly is a difficult task and one that should be practiced during bullpen sessions and in drills.

Framing is a subtle movement of the wrist that drags the ball toward the strike zone. This slight movement occurs just as you catch the ball. The keyword here is slight. Do not frame a pitch more than a few inches or partial movement of the wrist. Umpires are not stupid or blind and will not be swayed to call a strike by some miraculous ball that changed direction and moved a foot to the right. The framing motion is smooth and should not be done in a jerking motion.

For a pitch that is down in the zone and you are attempting to frame, catch it in the normal overhand position and then absorb or funnel it toward your stomach in a motion that is backward and up. Use your entire arm for this and not just your wrist. DO NOT flick your wrist up or catch it underhand if you are attempting to frame the low pitch. The reasoning from an umpire's perspective is that a ball that is caught underhand crossed the plate too low in the zone for it to be called a strike. It looks like a ball if you catch it underhand. In a perfect world, the way you catch a pitch should not matter, only where the pitch crosses through the strike zone. Catch the low pitch overhand.

## **Get Around the Ball**

When I describe proper framing techniques to my catchers, I use the phrase "get around the ball." Simply put, getting around the ball means catching the outside of the baseball and closing the four fingered part of the glove in the direction of the strike zone. The outside of the baseball is the side of the ball that is furthest away from the middle of the strike zone. Using this technique in conjunction with framing produces more strikes being called on borderline pitches.

## **Obvious Balls**

There is no reason to frame a pitch that is an obvious ball. Catch the ball and throw it back to the pitcher.

## **Don't Show Up the Umpire!!!!**

Never frame a pitch for more than a moment or two. Umpires are human and they make mistakes from time to time. They may miss a pitch now and then that should be called a strike. Remember, that if you are framing a pitch, the pitch is a borderline strike anyway. Showing up the umpire on a call that didn't go your way by holding your mitt where you caught the ball only causes more problems than it solves. The fans will start to get on the umpire for missing a call, which might bother the umpire. As a result, you are less likely to get borderline calls later in the game. Although an umpire should be impartial and consistent with his calls, he is human. Strike calls that he used to give you might now be called as balls.

The best way to deal with a close pitch is to ask the umpire at a later time (next batter or inning) where was the pitch? In a friendly manner, tell him that you thought the pitch was pretty good. See the section on umpire rapport for more info on catcher and umpire interaction.

**KEYS:** Toward the Zone, Smooth Movement, Slight Movement, Funnel to Belly if Low, Overhand, Only Strikes, Around the Ball, Hold for an Instant

## **Blocking**

Besides receiving and communication, the most important skill for a catcher to develop is the ability to block pitches in the dirt. Teams will take advantage of a catcher who is a poor blocker. Catchers who can block well keep base runners from advancing and instill confidence in their pitchers. A confident pitcher is a better pitcher.

Blocking is simply defined as using whatever means available to knock down and control a pitch that bounces. The key term is control. I may be able to get in front

of the ball with my body, but if that ball bounces too far away from me (i.e. I don't control it) a good base runner will still advance. The following basic technique should be used when blocking and controlling pitches in the dirt.

## Technique

The catcher should already be in the ready stance when attempting to block. Your hips and shoulders should be square to the pitcher. Recognize the pitch and quickly thrust your knees to the ground while remaining square to the pitcher. Clear your feet by moving them back and to the side, with your toes pointed away from your body. Your knees should almost land where your feet were located and be spread apart just past shoulder width. Do not just fall forward to your knees, as this takes too long. You need to get down quickly. Clear your feet and thrust your knees down.

Your glove should move from your target position to directly between your legs with your palm up, facing the pitcher and your throwing hand positioned behind the glove. The web of the glove should be against the ground and both arms should be snug with your body. This hand and arm position keeps a ball from going through your five hole. Tuck both elbows against your body to provide a greater surface area for blocking.

The upper body position is critical to controlling the deflection of the ball. Keeping your shoulders square to the pitcher, round your shoulders and bend at the waist so your upper body is leaning forward over your thighs. This creates a down angle that will deflect a ball down in front of you and at a controlled distance. Tuck your chin to your chest so you do not get hit in the throat.

DO NOT try and scoop a pitch in the dirt with your glove. This is a bad habit to get into and most of the time you will fail.

**ADVANCED TIP:** For the advanced catcher, you can slightly give with the pitch as it hits your body. This helps your ability to control the ball even more.

## Pitches to the Side

For pitches that do not come directly at you, there is a slight adjustment that needs to be made with your positioning. Obviously, you cannot just drop straight down or you'll miss the ball. You need to slide your body to the location where the ball will be. There are two ways to slide your body into position. One way is to push off with both feet and drop down into position, as you are moving. The other way is to take a jab step with the lead foot and drop down as you move. Either way can be used. Experiment and find the one that is the quickest way for you to get into position.

Another slight adjustment you need to make for a pitch to the side is a change in the angle of your hips and shoulders. The purpose is to help you control the ball

and keep it directly in front of you. Remember to keep your shoulders square to the pitcher. The key word is pitcher. If you were to walk around the pitcher in a 360-degree arc, keeping your shoulders square to the pitcher, the angle of your shoulders changes as you move. This is important to know for balls that are thrown to the sides of a catcher.

The best way to illustrate this point is to imagine throwing a ball against a wall. If the wall is square to you and you throw it directly at it, the ball will come back to you. If you throw the ball from an angle at the wall the ball will bounce to the side. If you throw the ball from an angle and the wall suddenly squares up to you, the ball will return back to you.

From a birds-eye view and looking directly down at the catcher...if you slide to your right, your right shoulder should be slightly in front of the left. *In other words you are angling your body so the ball will bounce back toward the pitcher.* The same is true if you slide in the other direction. This is a SLIGHT angling of the shoulders. Do not angle too much or the ball will deflect too far away.

\*On a pitch that is extremely wide, you will not have an opportunity to get into the proper position to block the pitch. Get to it any way you can and knock it down using whatever means available (i.e. glove, bare hand).

## Breaking Balls

Blocking breaking balls requires you to be aware of the spin of the pitch and how the ball is going to react once it hits the ground. A pitcher throwing a curve ball or slider will cause the ball to bounce in the opposite direction. For example, a right-handed pitcher throws a slider. From the catcher's perspective, the ball in flight is moving down and to the right. However, if the ball hits the dirt it will bounce back to the left or in most cases, straighten out. You need to account for this change of direction. Usually, the movement in the opposite direction is minimal. So, do not over compensate when attempting to block these pitches. With enough practice and game experience, you will develop a feel for how certain pitches will react to hitting the ground. It also helps to know your pitcher and how much spin or break he generates on the ball, which will affect how far the ball changes direction.

**ADVANCED TIP:** *A pitcher throws a curve ball or slider that bounces 10 feet in front of home plate. If you drop to your blocking position, the ball will either bounce over your head or hit your mask or shoulders. Stay low and read the bounce. If it bounces up shift into a crouched standing position, attempting to block the ball with your body.*

**KEYS:** Knock Down, Control, Thrust Knees, Glove Position, Tuck Elbows, Bend Waist, Round Shoulders, Tuck Chin, Slide to Location, Square to Pitcher, Breaking Ball Spin

# Throwing

Throwing out potential base stealers is a fundamental skill that separates a good catcher from a great catcher. Professional scouts consider throwing ability (SAQ - strength, accuracy, and quickness) when determining which catchers to follow and potentially draft. Proper throwing technique enhances a player's chances for success when throwing out base runners.

## Grip

A proper grip is essential for accurate throws. Grip the ball across the seams as if you were a pitcher throwing a four-seam fastball. Ideally, every throw you make should be with a four-seam grip. A good time to work on your grip is when you are warming up before practice or a game. With enough practice, you will automatically start gripping the ball in this manner. It will become second nature.



## Stealing

A catcher's ability to throw out runners attempting to steal is a huge defensive asset. Not only do you keep runners out of scoring position, but also you force the other team to play station to station (base to base), hit and run, or bunt a runner into scoring position. A good throwing catcher at the Major League level only throws out roughly 35% of all attempted base stealers. The main reason for this low success rate is that bases are mostly stolen off pitchers and not catchers. To have success throwing out runners, you need to be quick and have a strong accurate throw.

## Throwing to Second – Throwing Styles

There are 3 main styles of throwing to second base. Each one has its strengths and weaknesses. There is a certain rhythm to each of the throws that you will develop as you practice and use them. For all throws - **throw through the target, not to it!**

### 1. Jab Step

The first style is the Jab Step. To perform the jab step, assume the ready stance. Just as you are about to catch the ball take a small step, a "jab step," toward second base with your throwing side leg. For a right-handed catcher, this means jabbing with your right leg. The inside of your ankle should be pointed in the direction of second base. This step is very small and meant to get your

momentum moving toward your target. Catchers with weaker arms should consider using this method.

As you take this step STAY LOW. Do not stand up straight. After receiving the ball rake the ball into the throwing position. Rake quickly, taking your mitt from the receiving position or where you caught the ball to your ear or upper shoulder area (right ear for a right handed catcher). As you are raking the pitch, you should be transferring the ball to your throwing hand. Your throwing hand should have been behind the glove in the ready stance. This positioning facilitates a quick transfer and proper grip on the ball. Your front shoulder should now be pointed at second base; the ball in your throwing hand, and you should be striding with your left leg toward your target.

Now, make a *short quick throw* to second, transferring the weight from your backside to your front. Stay low, stay on top of your throw (don't drop your elbow), throw through the target, and keep your momentum moving toward the target. Do not let your momentum fall off line or away from your target. The target is a two-by-two foot square from the middle of the bag toward the second base side. Your follow through should be low and your throwing hand should almost hit your left knee. If you stand up too early or do not follow through, your throw will most likely be off-line and sail into the outfield.

## 2. Rock and Throw

The second throwing style to second base is the Rock and Throw. Simply keep your right foot planted where you caught the ball. Now, transfer your weight to the backside leg (rock) or load, rake to the throwing position, step toward your target (transferring your weight to the front side), and deliver a strong accurate throw. This method is fairly quick and can be used for pitches down the middle or to the backhand side. Avoid using this method on pitches to the left side of your body.

## 3. Replacement

The final throwing style is Replacement or Jump Pivot. Replacement is the quickest style and demands a strong arm to use properly. A strong arm is needed because there is little forward body momentum toward your target. Your legs start parallel with home plate and you "hop" into throwing position perpendicular to home. For a better picture, think of a clock. The feet in the ready stance start at the 3 and 9 positions. Simultaneously, you move both feet or "hop" into the 6 and 12 position. The back foot should actually be moving and planted a little sooner than the front to facilitate a proper backside load. Make sure to rotate the hips and shoulders. You should be raking to the throwing position as you perform the "hop." Now, deliver a strong accurate throw to second. Be quick! Remember, to throw through your target and stay low.

**Side Note:** The hop is NOT a jump. You must stay low and quickly shift your feet to the 6 and 12 position.

## Hitter Swings and Falls Across Plate

A situation may arise where a runner is attempting to steal and the hitter swings and misses and falls across home plate. As a catcher, this is a distraction and the hitter could possibly interfere with your throw. Do not avoid him. If he falls into you or your throwing lane, make contact. The umpire will call interference and the runner will be out.

## Final Thoughts

Pitch location often determines the style of throw you use. For pitches directly at you, use any of the three methods. For a pitch to your backhand side, use any of the three methods, with Rock and Throw being the most effective for an extreme backhand. For a pitch to the forehand side you can use any of the three styles, however Replacement and Jab Step are most effective. For any extremely outside pitch, you need to adjust your body and get behind the ball. Stay low and make sure your momentum is toward second base. Do not fall off to the side. You will also have to adjust what style you use depending on whether the hitter is right or left hand. A pitch inside to a lefty (your backhand) will make it more difficult to Rock and Throw because the hitter may be in your throwing lane. Experiment and practice each style so you will be able to use them without thinking.

**KEYS:** Three Styles of Throwing: Jab Step, Rock and Throw, Replacement or Jump Pivot, Load the Backside, Rake to Throwing Position, Proper Grip, Short Quick Release, Accuracy Matters, Throw Through the Target, Follow Through to Target

## Throwing to Third Base

Throwing to third base can be quite an adventure for beginning and inexperienced catchers with a right handed hitter at the plate. What should you do when the hitter is in your way? Do you move around the hitter? Throw over top of him? Actually, it depends on the pitch location, the height of the hitter, and how tall you are.

With a smaller right-handed hitter at the plate, you can throw over top of him. Use one of the three throwing methods discussed in Catcher Throwing Styles to Second Base.

## Move Around Hitter to Throw

For many catchers, throwing over hitters is not an option and I teach all of my catchers to move around the hitter for a clear throwing lane. Moving around a hitter involves recognizing the pitch location and moving accordingly. On a pitch away from a right-handed hitter, step forward with your right leg toward the second baseman. You will be throwing from the field side. Some catchers have a tendency to drop their arm angle down to throw around a hitter. Do not side arm the throw around the hitter. The throw will be less accurate and weaker. This will take practice to discover how far out you need to go to clear the hitter for a clear throwing lane. Do not take more than a step or you will take too much time and the runner will be safe.

For pitches down the middle and to the inside on a right-handed hitter, you will be taking a step behind the hitter. Start moving just as you catch the ball and shuffle behind the hitter. Make sure your momentum is toward third as you throw. You should not be falling away toward the dugout or your throw will be inaccurate.

Left-handed hitters should not interfere with your throwing lane so use one of the three throwing methods that works best for you. For an inside pitch to a left-handed hitter use the Rock and Throw method.

### **THROW THROUGH THE TARGET, NOT TO IT!**

**KEYS:** Recognize pitch location, For Right Handed Hitters: Clear the Hitter, Step In Front on a Pitch Away, Step Behind on a Pitch Down the Middle or Inside, Three Throwing Methods,

## Other Throws

Throughout the course of a game, other throwing situations may arise:

### Pickups - Fielding the Ball

There are a number of situations that arise where a catcher must field a ball; a guy has hit a chopper in front of the plate, the batter bunted, a wild pitch in the dirt with runners on, or a dropped third strike. The catcher must find the ball and get to it quickly to make a play.

There are two ways to field the ball as a catcher. The first way is the scoop method. Use this method when the ball is rolling. If the ball is toward the pitcher or first base, get around the baseball so that your back is to left field; keep your legs wide, your butt low. Using both your mitt and throwing hand, simultaneously scoop the ball together. Shuffle your feet and make the throw. Getting around the baseball means your body is preset and aligned to make the throw, feet aligned

and shoulders toward your target. Balls down the third base line should be fielded with your butt facing first base. Again, scoop the ball with your mitt and bare hand working together. You will have to reset yourself after you field the ball to make your throw.

The other method is bare hand and is used for balls that are stationary. Create a fork with all of your fingers and pluck the ball from the ground. Get around the ball the same way you did using the scoop method. If you have time, readjust your grip. Set yourself and then throw. For a ball down the third base line, aim your butt toward first and after fielding the ball, reset to throw.

\*I recommend using the scoop method for all fielded balls. The only time I allow my catchers to use a bare hand is in a do-or-die situation where the play needs to be made very quickly. Use the scoop method in inclement weather or when the grass is wet.

## Clearing the Runner

A situation may arise where you field a ball and the runner blocks your throwing lane to first base. In this situation you need to clear the runner. A general rule of thumb is to use the first base line as a guide. Anything to the left of the left of the line (in the field of play), move toward the infield to clear your throwing lane, set, then throw a strike to first. The first baseman should be to the inside of the bag and giving you a good target. If you need to make a play on a ball to the right of the baseline, move to the outside, set, and throw to first. The first baseman should read and adjust to the side you move to. There may even be times where the first baseman is off of first to allow an even greater throwing lane for you. Remember, if you throw the ball and it hits the runner while he is in play (on the line or to the left of the line), he is out.

## Pitch Out

Occasionally, your coach may call for a pitch out. The purpose of the pitch out is to give the catcher a greater chance of throwing out a runner attempting to steal. You will give the pitcher a special signal so he knows where to throw the pitch. The pitch will be delivered to middle of the batter's box that does not contain a hitter. Expect the ball about chest high if you are standing. Assume your regular catching stance and only move to that location (batter's box) after the pitcher has delivered the pitch. Using one of the 3 throwing methods, make a quick strong throw to the base. The Jab Step works best.

## Pick Off - Experienced Catchers

Another tool at the catcher's disposal is the ability to pick off runners that get a large secondary lead or are leaning toward the next base. A catcher with a great arm and a quick release can be a huge asset by keeping runners honest on

secondary leads and retiring base runners. You can attempt a pick at any base. Be careful with throws to third as you are throwing into the runner. To attempt a pick you can use any of the three throwing methods discussed earlier. Make sure you clear the hitter and have a clear throwing lane.

There is a fourth throwing style that is useful for pick off attempts at first base, the snap throw. The snap throw, if done properly, can be quite effective. After receiving the pitch quickly rotate the upper body while staying in a squatting position. Make the throw with your shoulders pointed at your target and your lower body still in a squat or kneel. Be quick and accurate. The most effective pitch to perform the snap throw is a pitch to the right side of your body (right handed catcher).

### Back To Pitcher - After Pitches

After every pitch throw the ball with some authority back to the pitcher. For one, it looks better. Two, if you lob the ball back it makes you look lazy. Three, a runner who's quick enough and is paying attention will steal while you lob the ball to the pitcher.

**KEYS:** Scoop Method, Clear the Runner, Pick Off Attempts - Snap Throw, Pitch Out Position

# **Leadership**

From calling pitches and defenses to working with pitchers and umpires, catchers have a wide range of responsibilities that require intelligence, tact, baseball sense, and above all, leadership. One of the most important qualities for a catcher to possess is the ability to lead. A coach needs to develop a catcher's leadership ability and a catcher needs to accept his role as a leader and work on those skills.

## **Emotional Stability**

Focus on your defensive responsibilities. You need to have the mentality of leaving the bat on the rack when you're catching. Forget the weak ground ball to short your last at-bat...it's over. Forget what Sally was telling you about Suzie during lunch. That is only a distraction and you can take care of that after the game. Your responsibility to the team is to focus on the present.

## **Confidence**

Take charge of the situation. Be vocal. Make decisions with confidence. Confidence comes from the knowledge that the decisions you make are correct. Learn the game and the reasons you or your coaches are making certain decisions. If you are calling pitches, be confident. Everyone makes mistakes. Face up to those mistakes and learn from them.

## **Command Respect**

Leaders command the respect of their peers. Respect is earned. As a catcher you must earn the respect of your battery mates. What do the pitchers want from you? The pitching staff has to respect your work ethic and your intelligence, your ability to call a game, and your ability to help them be a better pitcher. They have to feel you're helping them to be the very best pitcher they can be. The pitcher must feel as confident and comfortable with you as possible. Get to know the pitching staff. The only way a catcher can know the members of his pitching staff is to catch them...all of them. Be able to relate to different types of personalities.

## **Respect the Umpire**

Another notable aspect of the catcher's leadership role is interacting with umpires. Be a diplomat and a politician. On a game-by-game basis, interact with the umpire. Develop a professional relationship. Never show up the umpire and always do your best to protect the umpire from balls in the dirt. See umpire rapport for more info. As a catcher you are the field general. Set an example for your teammates to follow. Know your responsibilities and execute with

confidence. Leadership from the catcher can be the difference between a 5-10 team and a 10-5 team.

## **Relays, Cutoffs, Plays at Home**

### **Relays and Cutoffs**

Your job as a catcher is to direct the defense when the ball is put in play. A number of situations arise throughout the course of a game where you will have to align a cutoff man to home or call out where a relay throw should go. Infielders should know their positioning ahead of time. These situations include runners who tag on a fly ball, base hits, and extra base hits. The catcher should help direct the defense as you have the entire field in front of you. As a catcher be vocal on plays not only to home, but also to other bases. Remember to yell in an authoritative and loud manner, so your infielders can hear you.

#### **Relays to Home**

Before a throw to home can even take place, position your cutoff man. The cutoff man should know how far out (toward the outfielder) he needs to go. The arm strength of the outfielder and the length of the throw determine the infielder's positioning. Your job is to align the cut off man with home. Simply use "left" and "right" commands to make adjustments. Depending on where the ball is hit and the system you use, the cut off man could be the third baseman, pitcher, or first baseman on base hits. For extra base hits, expect the shortstop or second baseman to be the relay. The catcher should know who is the relay in every situation. This should be covered in your pre-season practices.

As a catcher you have the entire field in front of you. You are able to determine where a ball needs to be thrown or held once it reaches the cutoff man. Remember, the cutoff man may have his back to the infield and will have to rely on your communication to quickly relay to the correct base or hold the ball.

There are two phrases I use with my catchers to help them communicate with the infielders. The infielders use the same two phrases when there are plays at other bases, so there is a common language and no confusion. The first phrase is "cut" and the base. So, if there was a play at home the catcher should yell, "cut four". This tells the relay man to catch and quickly relay the ball to the plate. The catcher could also yell, "cut two" if there is no chance at getting the runner at home and a play can be made on a runner at second base. The second phrase is just plain "cut". A catcher who yells this is telling the cutoff man to cut and hold the ball. If you say nothing, the cutoff man should let the ball go and you will field the throw. The cutoff man should know to let the ball go through ahead of time.

One area that takes some practice is using your judgment as whether to cut throws to the plate. Some coaches have the cutoff man; relay everything, taking away the catcher's decision. I don't like this method. You are not teaching the catcher to make decisions and his leadership ability while the ball is in play and that is his job. As a catcher, you need to be aware of the following things before you decide to cut or relay the throw.

**For beginners:** Is the ball dying in flight or does it have enough velocity to get to you? Is the throw online (too far left or right)?

**For experienced catchers:** Many outfielders throw a ball that tails and you need to know how it's going to bounce. How good is the outfielder's arm? How thick is the grass on the infield, which will slow down a throw? How fast is the runner? What is the situation? Is it do-or-die? Depending on the score, should you cut the throw and get the hitter who's trying to advance to second?

## Plays at Home

One of the most exciting plays in baseball is a close play at the plate. A catcher is expected to block the plate and apply a tag on the runner attempting to score.

### Position

The main idea is to position your body to block the plate. Correct positioning is important to avoid injury and be in the best possible position to make a tag on a runner. Position your left heel a foot off the front left corner of the plate. Angle your left foot toes and knee toward third base and position your other leg pen to accept the throw. Allow the runner the very back portion of the plate. Assume an athletic stance so you are able to react to a throw or bounce. LEAVE YOUR MASK ON! This will protect your head and face in leagues that allow collisions. It will also protect you on throws that may bounce up.

\*The angle of your left foot is very important. DO NOT angle your foot or knee in any other direction than directly at the third base bag. Ideally, you want your foot and knee to align directly with the on-coming runner. An improper angle and a runner sliding into your leg could cause knee and ankle injuries. Also, your catcher's gear mainly protects the front of your shin. This front protection should be toward the oncoming base runner.

### Align Cutoff Man

After you are positioned correctly, align the cut off man. Use the basic commands discussed earlier. Both the catcher and the infielders should know who the cut off man is. A side note: There might also be plays at the plate on ground balls to the infielders. If there is not a force at the plate, you must position yourself to block

the plate. If there is a force at home, make sure you are touching home with one foot (preferably your right foot) and give a good target for your fielder to throw to. After catching the ball, quickly come off of the plate to avoid the runner sliding and be ready to make a play elsewhere. You may even be able to double up the hitter at first.

## Field the Throw

You have correctly positioned yourself and the throw is strong and online. Now you must read the trajectory of the throw. DO NOT let the throw short hop you. A good throw will be in the air (from a relay) or should be a long hop. If you read a short hop, go get the ball before it bounces. This means that you will have to move out of your set position. Field the ball out in front of your body. Once you field the ball, apply the tag to the runner.

If you cannot field the throw cleanly, knock the ball down using your body. Do not let other base runners advance.

## Apply the Tag

You've fielded the ball cleanly. Quickly turn to find the base runner. You should have been able to see the runner approaching home using your peripheral vision. Now you must apply the tag. The best tag to use is a two-handed sweep tag. The ball should be in your bare hand and your hand should be in your glove. This keeps the ball from being jarred loose. Apply the tag to the closest part of the runner's body and get out of the way. If you sense a collision is about to occur, brace yourself by getting low and making the tag. Pay attention to other base runners.

**Experienced Catchers:** One draw back from the two-handed style is that your range is limited. If you see the runner attempting to slide around the tag to the backside, you may have to transfer the ball to your glove and use a one-handed sweep tag.

**A Trick Tag:** Here is a cool trick tag someone showed me. *Field the ball using your glove and perform the two-handed sweep tag. As you sweep across to make the tag, remove the ball from the mitt with your cupped throwing hand and hold it against your chest. It helps if you have large hands. The ball should not be visible to the umpire cupped against your chest. This should be done in one motion while you are applying the tag. After the tag is made, bring the empty glove back to your chest. Act like you are removing the ball from the mitt with your bare hand and show the umpire the ball. If done properly, the ball will appear to have been inside the glove the entire time.*

**KEYS:** Be Vocal, Align Cut Off Man, Simple Commands and Communication, Correct Position, Field Throw, Sweep Tag

# Signals

The information in this section deals exclusively with communication between the pitcher and the catcher. Other types of signals, such as signals between the catcher and infielders, will be discussed in the [Misc. Situations](#) section.

## Communicate!

Clear communication between the pitcher and catcher is vitally important to successful baseball. Obviously the catcher and pitcher cannot verbally communicate, so, they must communicate through a series of hand signals. The most common way for the catcher to relay a sign to the pitcher, or call a pitch, is using the fingers of his throwing hand. The signal is given from the squatting position and the hand should be positioned between the legs and be back up against or close to your cup. Watch that your hand is not too low or your signs will be visible under your body. The signal should be given with deliberate finger movements to allow the pitcher to see the signs. Do not give your sign too quickly or you will confuse your pitcher. The catcher's legs should be opened wide enough so only the pitcher and middle infielders can see what pitch is being called. Do not open your legs too far or the coaches from the opposing team can see your signs and relay the pitch to the hitter. Your glove hand should be positioned to the outside and just below the knee of your left leg (for right-handed catchers) to aid in blocking your signs.

### *Take Note:*

- Make sure the hitter is not peaking at your signs!
- The signal for a pitch should only be given while the pitcher is on the pitching rubber.
- Allow the hitter a brief moment to get set in the box before you give your sign.

### *For Vision Problems*

If a pitcher has trouble seeing signs use a thin strip of white athletic tape between your middle knuckles on your throwing hand or paint your finger nails with White Out. You can also switch to giving [body signals](#) or [glove signals](#). See below for more info.

## Common Pitch Signs

The following is a list of common signs for basic pitches.

The catcher puts down:

- One Finger = Fast Ball
- Two Fingers = Curve Ball
- Three Fingers = Slider
- Four Fingers and/or Wiggle Fingers = Change Up

The number of fingers for a certain pitch is arbitrary and can change. For example you could use: One Finger = Fast Ball, Two Fingers = Curve Ball, and Three Fingers = *Change Up*. In fact, the signs may be different for each pitcher. The types of pitches a pitcher throws could determine the signs. Just make sure that both the pitcher and catcher are on the same page. Make the signs easy to remember! Talk to your pitcher in the pen before the game. Find out what pitches is he throwing and what signs are you going to use for each pitch. In the event of a relief pitcher, make a quick visit to the mound after his warm-up pitches and get on the same page.

## Type and Location

The most common information being passed between a catcher and pitcher is the type of pitch and pitch location. In the most basic form of this system, the catcher will put down a sign for the pitch type and then tap the inside of one of his thighs to signal location. A slightly more advanced method is using two signs from the catcher. Give one signal for pitch type and one for location in that order. For example: Using the list from Common Pitch Signs and odd number outside and even for an inside pitch...the catcher puts down two signs (1 then 3). The first number tells the pitcher to throw a fastball and the second number (an odd number) tells him the pitch should be away to a hitter. Now you figure out the pitch and location for these pitches.

1. (2,1)
2. (1,4)
3. (4,3)

Answer: 1. Curveball Away    2. Fastball Inside    3. Change Up Away  
Call for a pitch high in the zone or a ball in the dirt using a couple of basic signals. One way to signal this change in height is with glove and through body language. Briefly show the pitcher where you expect the pitch to go using your glove hand. Another way is to signal the pitcher using your signal hand before or after you give him the type of pitch. Maybe flatten out your hand for down and flick a thumb up for a pitch up in the zone. It's up to you.

With a runner on second base the catcher and pitcher will have to disguise the pitch and location to keep the runner from relaying that information to the hitter. See the section below With Runners on 2nd for more info.

## Methods of Giving Signs

There are three main methods that I have seen and used for calling signs in a game. The first way was discussed earlier in the Signals section and involves using fingers to call pitches and locations. Another way to give signs is to combine hand signals and body signals. For example: I may touch a part of my equipment with my signal hand (mask, chest, thigh) and then put down a series of finger signals in the normal position. Depending what part of my equipment I touched will affect what those hand signals mean. This system is for older players and is usually only used with a runner on second base. The third method is using only body signals. This method is actually very simple to use and is extremely effective for pitchers with vision problems or with poor lighting during night games. An example would be: Touching your mask = fastball, touching your chest = curve ball, and touching your knee = change up. Don't be Captain Obvious with these signals. You will have to disguise these and misdirect the other team using fake finger signals from the normal position. Act like you are merely adjusting your mask or chest protector when in actuality you are giving signals.

## With Runners on 2nd

With a runner on second base you have to be extremely careful and disguise your signals so the runner cannot relay the pitch and/or location to the hitter. The most basic way is to put down a series of numbers. Only the pitcher and catcher know what the "key" is to figuring out the meaning of the signs. The easiest way to explain this is to provide an example.

We will use the same signals from Common Pitch Signs and Type and Location sections. The catcher will put down a series of signs (4). Using his fingers he puts down (2,1,3,1). In our example, only the first two signs will mean anything to the pitcher. The first sign is the pitch and the second sign is the location. Seeing the signs (2,1,3,1), the pitcher should know to throw a curve ball (2) and outside (1). The (3) and second (1) mean absolutely nothing. Now try and figure out this sign combination: (1,1,4,2). The answer is a fastball outside. Again, this is just a basic example. Sometimes the keys can be quite complicated. This is especially true at the college and professional level.

The key is to keep the signals easy to understand for both the pitcher and catcher, but difficult enough that a runner on second will not be able to steal your signs. If you do catch a runner stealing signs, call time out, talk to your pitcher and change the signs.

## Other Signals

Other signals that are relayed to the pitcher through signals from the catcher include: pitch outs; pick offs, holding runners close, and the shake off. Most of these decisions and signals will be made by your coach or infielders and given to you for you to relay to the pitcher. See these sections for more info: [Misc.](#) [Situations and Plays](#), [Throwing](#), and [Glossary](#).

**KEYS:** Hand Signals, Protect Signs, Easy To Read, Easy To Remember, Communicate With Pitcher, Methods, Disguise Signs, Type/Location

## Calling a Game

Calling your own game requires you to pay attention to details. Keep mental notes on hitters, runners, pitchers, as well as opposing team tendencies. Before attempting to call your own game, pay attention to how your pitching coach calls pitches during other games. Why is he calling for certain pitches in certain counts? What is he trying to accomplish? What is the game situation? If you don't understand something, ask the coach after the inning why he is calling that pitch in that situation. \*This is assuming the coach has a clue. Once, you understand the reasoning for calling certain pitches; incorporate this knowledge as you call your own game.

### Some general rules:

- A pitch up in the zone will be hit in the air.
- A pitch down in the zone will be hit on the ground.
- A pitch with downward movement will be hit on the ground.
- A hitter has a tendency to roll over (wrists) change ups and will hit them on the ground or hit weak fly balls.
- A hitter may pull off or be out in front of a curve ball or slider causing him to hit a weak ground ball or pop-up.
- A hitter who strides into the plate will have trouble hitting hard inside pitches. He will get jammed.
- A hitter who strides open will have trouble with change ups and breaking balls away.
- An overly aggressive hitter will chase bad pitches.
- Stick with the pitch that is working.
- Mix, Mix, Mix!!!

## **Research!!!**

Gather as much information as possible and apply it to the current situation.

### **Know Your Pitcher**

Know your pitcher and his capabilities. What are his strengths and weaknesses? What is his best pitch? Is he having trouble throwing a certain pitch for a strike? Is he locating his pitches? Has he faced this team or these hitters before? How did he do and what did he do to get each hitter out? Does he get more ground ball outs than fly outs? How fast is your pitcher to the plate with runners on base? Does he hold the runners well? Does he have an out pitch and is it on today? How does he field his position?

### **Know the Hitters**

In most cases your team will have faced the opposing team before. The higher you go and older you get, teams will keep records or scouting reports of every at bat for an opposing player. This helps to correctly position a defense and allows the pitcher and catcher to attack a hitter's weakness

As a catcher you should have mental notes on every hitter. What are his tendencies? What pitch does he like to hit? What pitch does he struggle with? Does he swing first pitch? Is he overly aggressive at the plate and expand the strike zone (swing at bad pitches)? Is he a pull, opposite field, or spray hitter? What number hitter is he? Does he have a lot of power? Is there a chance he drag bunts? How fast is the hitter? Where does he stand in the box? How close is he to the plate? Is he open, even, or closed in his stance? How does he stride: pull out, straight, dive in? With two strikes, will he cut down his swing and put the ball in play? What has he done in his previous at bats today? What pitch did he hit hard or whiff on?

### **Know the Other Team**

Teams do not play the same style of baseball. Some teams will play station-to-station (base to base). This means they are waiting for the big hit or home run. Other teams will play small ball. Teams that play small ball will move runners with sacrifice bunts, steal bases, hit and run, and pressure the defense. Still other teams will use a combination of the two styles depending on the hitter, base runners, pitcher, and game situation. In general, teams that play station-to-station look for the big inning, while small ball teams will look to score one or two runs an inning every inning. Know the other team's philosophy. What are their tendencies? What have they done in the past in the same situation?

## Know the Situation

Throughout the game, strategies change depending on the situation. You could have a situation with a runner on 1st and 3rd and one out in the first inning and the same 1st and 3rd situation with one out in the last inning. Depending on the score and hitter, your objective may be different. Early in the game (1st inning) you are trying not to give up a big inning, so you will probably let the runner from 3rd score and get a force at second or attempt a double play. Late in the game and up a run, the defense will want to cut down the run at the plate on a non-double play ball.

In this example, the catcher needs to know the hitter and call pitches accordingly. With what pitch is the hitter most likely to hit a ground ball? Should we go for the K?

## Different Ways to Pitch to Hitters

There are different ways to go about pitching to hitters. One important rule is to mix pitches, speeds, levels, and locations. Do not show the hitter the same sequence of pitches every at bat. Maybe the first two times a batter comes to the plate, start him off with fastballs. Then the third time, use a curve or change up. If you know a hitter has trouble hitting sliders, feed him a constant diet of sliders. Make sure to mix in another pitch, but keep it out of the zone and un-hittable. Change speeds and/or eye level. Then go back to the slider. Some hitters are read-and-react hitters, while others will look for certain pitches in certain counts and situations. Know this ahead of time and out think them.

### Going At Hitters

Going at a hitter means you are forcing the batter to swing the bat. The pitcher is throwing strikes and not nibbling at the corners of the plate. Usually, when this term is used, the pitcher is throwing fastballs. This is a very aggressive approach and works well in a lot of situations. You're saying to the hitter, here's my best fastball. Let's see if you can hit it.

### Pitching Carefully to Hitters

There are situations that arise during a game where you may want to pitch carefully to a hitter depending on the situation. An example would be a runner on 2nd base with two outs. First base is unoccupied and the other team's best hitter is at the plate. You do not want to intentionally walk him (well maybe if its tied and in the last inning), so you pitch him carefully. Do not give him anything good to hit and work the extreme corners. If you walk him, no big deal, it sets up a force play at second base. If he swings and hits a weak ground ball or can-of-corn, you did your job.

## Different Counts

The count during an at bat, along with the game situation, may determine whether you pitch carefully to a hitter or go right at him. In other words, you may change strategies during the at-bat. Maybe you start off calling two sliders and both are balls. The count is two balls and zero strikes. Now, you can challenge the hitter or decide to stay careful and throw a change up or another slider. Most hitters are looking for a fastball 2-0. The game situation and information you know about the hitter's tendencies determines what you call. Though unlikely, the hitter may always take with a 2-0 count. If you know the hitter's taking, throw the fastball. It's your job and your coach's job to know this information.

## Pitching Backwards

Pitching backwards is a term used to describe a certain pitching sequence that is the opposite of conventional wisdom. In other words, if most pitchers use the fastball to get ahead of hitters and then throw a curve ball ahead in the count, you would do the opposite. Throw curve balls to get ahead and fastballs when you are ahead. This style of pitch calling can be a useful tool to use when a hitter has seen a pitcher multiple times during a game or a pitcher has outstanding control of his breaking pitch/es.

## Saving Pitches for 2nd Time Through the Lineup

This philosophy is useful for pitchers with three or more pitches that they can throw for strikes. The idea behind this philosophy is to not show the other team every pitch in a pitcher's arsenal the first time through the batting order. For example, you may call only fastballs and change ups the first time through the order. The second time through, let them see that nasty slider. The more pitches opposing hitters get to see the less advantage your pitcher has. This style is useful for pitchers with great command of their fastball and a change up that drops.

## Set Up Pitches/Setting Up the Hitter

A set up pitch is used to throw the hitter off balance, so the next pitch will get him out. Usually, the set-up pitch precedes a strike out pitch or a pitch that the hitter will not hit hard. The purpose of using set-up pitches is to get the hitter off balance. For example: you may be calling all soft pitches (change up, curve ball) away, away, away. The hitter will be thinking away and then you bust him up and in with a fastball. You were using these soft away pitches to set up the hard inside pitch. Another example: you use that hard inside pitch to set up a breaking ball or change up away. You call three pitches away and then a high and tight fastball just under the hitter's hands. Now the hitter is thinking he needs to be quick if the pitcher comes hard and in again. Many times this will cause the hitter

to get out on his front foot or pull off a pitch away (especially if it's off speed). A good catcher will use the set-up pitch to his advantage.

## Waste Pitches

Waste pitches are almost exactly the same as a set-up pitch. In fact, they are exactly the same with one slight difference. Both set-up pitches and waste pitches have the same purpose, to set-up the next pitch. Where they differ is that a waste pitch is not meant to be anywhere near the strike zone. The purpose is to get the hitter to chase a bad pitch out of the zone and to set up the next pitch. The most frequent count for a waste pitch is with zero balls and two strikes. A cardinal rule in pitching is to never give up a 0-2 hit. The catcher will therefore call a waste pitch that will set up the next pitch.

**KEYS:** Mix Pitches, Gather Information, Know: Your Pitcher, the Other Team, the Other Hitter, the Situation, Adjust to What's Working, Different Ways to Pitch to Hitters, Waste Pitches, Setup Pitches

*\*For an outstanding article on calling your own game, check out "Calling Catchers" by R.J. Anderson. This article appeared in Coaching Management, September 2005*

## Catching Bullpens

Catching bullpens is certainly not the most glorious job a catcher performs. Bullpens usually consist of long hours of squatting in the pen while pitchers use YOU to work on THEIR game. Actually, catching bullpens, if taken seriously, is one of the most underutilized times during practice where catchers can actually work on their game. Catchers working in the bullpen should be in full gear at all times. **All catchers, even the starters, should spend time working in the bullpen.**

Take advantage of your time in the pen.

Listen to your pitching coach talk to his pitchers. You can pick up a lot of valuable information about pitching and what pitchers are trying to do with certain pitches, counts, and hitters. Some of the best pitching coaches and coaches in general were catchers at one time. Catchers have an opportunity to gather information on every aspect of the game.

Do not set up down the middle.

Don't do it during a game and don't do it catching a bullpen session. Work the corners of the plate. The pitching coach should have you alternating from side to

side of the plate (working inside and out to a right handed batter) in a series of pitches. Usually, you will receive two or more pitches in one location and then be asked to move. If your coach asks you to set up right down the middle, DO IT, but remember to off-set an inch or two from the exact middle. Many times the pitching coach may ask you to set down the middle if the pitchers are working on throwing breaking balls for strikes.



Pay attention to what the pitchers are throwing.

Use this knowledge in the game. What is their best pitch? How are certain pitches moving? Does this pitcher have a nasty slider that you need to be aware of (blocking)? Is a certain pitcher wild when throwing a changeup or other pitch? This is all useful game information of which you should be aware and put to use.

Work on receiving and framing pitches.

On average, you will see a couple of hundred pitches during a bullpen session (multiple pitchers). Be soft with your hands. Work on receiving and framing every bullpen session. \*See the sections on receiving and framing pitches for more information.

Work on Sticking Strikes.

One of my pet peeves is seeing catchers drop would-be strikes out of the strike zone and the pitches end up being called balls. Catchers have a tendency to do this with pitches in the lower third of the zone and with breaking balls. Stick the strike. Do not let the pitch's momentum move the ball from the zone. Work on sticking strikes every bullpen session.

Work on Blocking.

Pitchers are not perfect even though they sometimes tend to think so. Occasionally, they will bounce pitches in the dirt. Here is your chance to work on those blocking skills. In-season, set aside at least two bullpen sessions a week to work on your blocking. Out of season or before your in-season schedule begins; you should work on blocking almost every day if you want to be good.

**KEYS:** Work on Your Game, Blocking, Receiving, Framing,

## Covering Bases

The catching position is not for lazy players. You are involved in every play either through communication or through action. Besides the catching basics such as receiving, blocking, framing, and throwing, the catcher has other responsibilities that require movement from the home plate area.

### Back Up 1st Base

The catcher has a responsibility to back up first base on routine grounders hit to the infielders. Your purpose is to keep the hitter from advancing to second on a wild throw to first. After the ball is hit, run hard along the fence or along the out of play line to back up first. Be aware of the angle the throw is coming from and be ready to react to a wild throw. You should get help from your second baseman and right fielder on throws from third base.

With a runner on first base you can still back up first, just be aware that you may have to hustle back to the plate. *If there are runners on second or third base, stay at home. DO NOT back up first.* There may be a play at the plate.

### Covering 3rd on a Bunt

A situation may arise where the opposing team is trying to bunt a runner on first to second base. You may have to cover third if your third baseman fields the ball. Depending on your coach's philosophy, the pitcher may cover instead. I don't like a pitcher covering any base, as there is a potential for injury on a close play. So, unless your coach tells you not to cover third, get there as soon as the third baseman communicates he is making the play on the bunt.

**KEYS:** Back Up First Base, Be Aware of Base Runners

## **Pre-game Routine**

Before every game, there is a pre-game routine catchers need to perform to learn more about the nuances of the field they are about to play on.

### **1st and 3rd Base Line**

Before the game begins, roll balls down the first and third base lines to simulate bunts. Read how the balls roll. Do they roll toward the field of play, out of play, or straight? Is there a lip you need to be aware of that will change the direction of the ball as it's rolling? Is the grass long and slow or short and quick? Is the grass damp or wet? Is the dirt hard or soft? The answers to these questions will impact the decisions you make in the game.

### **Check the Fence**

Check the fence and grass area around home plate. Are there holes in the fence? How close is the fence to the plate? Throw practice balls against the fence to find out if there are any unusual bounces. If the backstop is not a fence, how does the ball react off the surface? Clear the area of any debris (paper, plastic, glass, etc.)

### **Know the Out of Play Rules**

Consult your coach or the umpire about the rules for areas that are out of play. This is important to know for pop-ups, wild throws, and wild pitches.

## Umpire Report

Umpire - catcher interaction can best be described as a political dance. The object is to get the most from the umpire through the exchange of information in a manner that does not offend the ump. This interaction will help the catcher and pitcher determine the called strike zone. Your purpose is to get as many called strikes for your pitcher as possible. This area of catching knowledge and the techniques for talking to umpires develop over time.

*The following information is an excerpt from "Catcher in the Raw" by Dennis Read. The article appears in the February 2000 issue of Coaching Management. Coaches interviewed for this article include: Mike Lane, Head Coach at the University of North Alabama, Ed Cheff, Head Coach at Lewis-Clark State College, and Mickey McMurtry, Head Coach at Lassiter High School in Marietta, Ga.*

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**It ain't nothin' till I call it. ~ Bill Klem, umpire**

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Another notable aspect of the catcher's leadership role is interacting with umpires. "That's something you have to nurture and develop," [Mike] Lane says. "We tell our guys, 'You have to be a diplomat back there, you have to be a politician.' If an umpire misses a curve that was right there, and the catcher knows it's a strike and says, 'Blue, that was there, wasn't it?,' he's telling the umpire he thinks he missed the call. A lot of umpires don't take well to that. But if the catcher says to the umpire, 'Blue, was that a little low?,' then he's giving him an opportunity to say 'Yes,' or 'You know, I might have missed that one.' Then the catcher can say, 'That's OK, we'll get the next one.'"



Your catchers should also find out if they're doing anything to block the umpire's view, preferably early in the game before he has to call any close pitches. "We teach our catchers to always start out asking the umpire, 'Blue, am I giving you enough room to see the ball?'" Lane says. "Don't ask him after he's missed a pitch, but start out the game like that. 'Blue, let me know if I'm getting in your way or moving too quickly, because I want to help you out.'" It's important for catchers to feel as if every pitch is on display, even in the bullpen or during practice. "They should get the feeling all the time that they're trying to sell that pitch," [Ed] Cheff says. "I want my catchers to have the mentality that, 'There's always an umpire behind me and this guy is going to make a call on this pitch and I'm trying to make it easy'

for him.' A lot of catchers are sloppy with this in drills and in the bullpen. Then they try to clean it up when they get in the game, and they can't."

It also helps to remind your catcher that it's a good idea to block every ball for the umpire. A ball doesn't hurt any less just because no one is on base. "You might be calling him Joe and thinking he's your best friend," Cheff says, "but the first time you won't block a ball for him, he's going to start to tighten down and I guarantee you his strike zone will change."

At least one coach has found that simply removing himself from the catcher-umpire equation works best. "I used to put my catchers in an adversarial role because I'd ask 'Was that pitch in there? Was that a strike?'" [Mickey] McMurtry says. "I was constantly putting the kid in between me and the umpire. And I think that's wrong. The umpire and catcher have a natural, cooperative relationship back there and they're going to take care of each other. I don't know what is shared between our catchers and the umpires, but they seem to get along since I got off the umpires."

*Dennis Read - Assistant Editor at Coaching Management*

**KEYS: Respect the umpire!**

## Miscellaneous Plays and Situations

This section covers a number of topics that are not large enough to devote an entire section to. Topics covered in this section include:

Game Pace | Bunts/Coverage | Squeeze Plays | Run Downs| Pick Offs  
Pass Balls/Wild Pitches | Pop Ups and Fouls | Double Steals | Dropped Third Strike | Intentional Walks | Stealing Home

## Signaling Plays

The catcher is responsible in most cases for calling plays in bunt situations as well as first and third situations. Before the pitcher steps on the rubber, get the play from your coach. Step out in front of home plate so your teammates can see and give the correct signals. The signals can be verbal, a series of signs (hand or body), or both. The purpose is to disguise the defensive play and put pressure on the offense to execute.

## Bunts/Coverage

In bunt situations, the catcher is the eyes of the defense and the decision maker because the play is happening in front of him. The catcher's job is to signal the play to the infielders and communicate while the play is unfolding. The fielders need to know if the third baseman is crashing or holding? Is the first baseman crashing or holding? What side does the pitcher cover? These plays should be worked out in practice. Everyone on the field should know what play is on and their responsibilities. The catcher must be decisive and communicate loud enough for his teammates to hear.

On a properly executed bunt, your only play will be to first base. However, if the bunt is too hard or right at the pitcher, and depending on how quickly your teammate fields it, you may have a play on the lead runner. Take into account whether or not the play is a force out. If it's not a force, get the out a first. Stay out of the big inning. However, if the play is a force, the bunt was hard, and fielded cleanly, don't be afraid to get that lead runner. Make the call early and loud. Keep repeating the call until the play is made. If the fielder bobbles the ball, the play is at first. The fielder should know ahead of time to go to first on a bobble.

Be ready to react to a poorly bunted ball in front of the plate. You may be able to get the lead runner if you're quick. If you feel the play will be too close, take the out at first. Stay out of the big inning. Remember to clear the runner before throwing to first. \*See the section on throwing for more info.

A situation may arise where the opposing team is trying to bunt a runner on first to second base. Cover third if your third baseman fields the ball. Depending on your coach's philosophy, the pitcher may cover instead. I don't like a pitcher covering any base, as there is a potential for injury on a close play. So, unless your coach tells you not to cover third, get there as soon as the third baseman communicates he is making the play on the bunt.

## Squeeze Plays

A squeeze play is a unique play during a game where the runner from third scores on a bunt by the batter. There are two main kinds of squeeze plays, the suicide and safety squeeze. The suicide squeeze gets its name because the runner breaks from third at the start of the pitcher's windup or on first movement in the stretch. If the batter fails to make contact with the pitch, the runner is dead at home, hence the suicide squeeze. A safety squeeze relies on the runner's ability to anticipate and read a successful bunt and then attempt to score.

A safety squeeze is difficult to combat and your only chance to get the runner at the plate is if your corner defense is up, the pitcher is a great athlete, the batter's bunt is poor, or the pitcher reads the break. If the batter executes correctly, make the play at first and get an out.

The suicide play is easier to detect because the runner from third gives away the play. If the pitcher doesn't see the runner break or hear his teammates' communication, then the best you can hope for is the batter to miss or pop up the pitch. If the pitcher does see the suicide attempt, he should throw the pitch up and in on a right-handed hitter or in the right-handed batters box. Even if you are set up away, expect the pitch up and in (to a right-hander). The purpose is to make the pitch impossible to bunt. Most players won't stand there and let the ball hit them in the head. One of two things will probably happen if the pitch is in the right location, the batter gets out of the way and the runner is dead at home or the batter attempts to bunt the pitch and is unsuccessful.

If the hitter misses the pitch, catch the ball and run at the base runner. Make the tag or start a run down. Remember, to chase him back toward third. If the attempt is successful, get the out at first.

## Run Downs

A correctly executed rundown should take no more than two throws once the rundown begins. A catcher is at a disadvantage during a rundown because of his shin guards. Here are guidelines for rundowns.

- Never run a player toward the next base. Always force him back to the base he came from.
- Stand to your teammate's throwing side and never directly behind the runner. This provides a clear throwing lane.
- If your teammate running at you is right handed, stand to the left of the runner, so your teammate doesn't have to throw across the runner.
- As the runner approaches, use a one word verbal command like "now" and step toward the runner as you say it. Your momentum should be moving toward the runner as you say the command.
- The ball should be delivered by your teammate on that command.
- Catch the ball with both hands and immediately remove the ball with your bare hand.
- Show the ball above your head and run at the runner. The ball should be in a position where you can throw it at a moments notice.
- Stay to the right side so you have a clear throwing lane if you need to make another throw.
- DO NOT pump fake. Many times this will fake out your teammates as well.
- Run hard at the runner and apply the tag or wait for a "now" command from your teammate.
- Give up the ball when you hear the command. Throw the ball to your teammates chest.
- Peel off out of the baseline. This way you will not interfere with the runner.
- Be in position at the other bag if the rundown continues.

If another runner occupies the base where the base runner came from (for example: a runner occupies 3rd base and you have a runner caught between home and 3rd), run him back to the base and tag both runners. The runner that was in the run down is out. The other runner is safe, but you might get him to step off the base.

## Pick Offs - pitcher

Pickoff plays vary from team to team and coach to coach. Some plays involve only the fielders and pitcher. Other plays depend on the catcher for the attempt to be successful. The most common pickoff plays are to second base. One of the more popular plays is the blind pickoff. This pickoff gets its name from the fact that the pitcher is not watching the play and relies on the catcher to signal when to turn and throw.

On the blind pickoff play, the fielder (usually the shortstop) will signal the play to the catcher. Maybe they notice the runner is not paying attention or is getting too big a lead. The catcher must then notify the fielder or confirm the play using a subtle signal. Now, signal the pitcher that the play is on. The pitcher must go through his usual routine so the play is not tipped off to the other team. The pitcher should then be looking at the plate and not paying any attention to the runner. This is a timing play and the catcher must read the middle infielder breaking for second. At the correct moment, signal the pitcher to turn and fire to second. The signal can be anything you want. We usually use a glove signal (dropping from the receiving position). The blind pickoff relies on the catcher's timing of the fielder reaching second base for a successful attempt.

## Pass Balls/Wild Pitches

Even the best catchers have mental and physical breakdowns from time to time. You will have a pitch in the dirt that you won't be able to block. It may take a bad hop or you just misplay it. If the ball gets away from you with runners on base or on a dropped third strike, you need to find it and get to it as quickly as possible. Do not turn around and run straight back; you will run into the umpire. Peel off to the left or right depending on the side the ball kicks to.

As you approach the ball, slide into position with your throwing leg out in front so you can quickly stand and plant this foot. Reach for the ball with your bare hand or the glove and hand scoop if space permits. For a play at the plate, you will have to turn and fire the ball to the pitcher who is covering home. You should have an idea of where home plate is even with your back to the field. Field the ball, wheel, and throw in one motion. For a play at first base, slide into position, get to your feet, then shuffle and throw to first. If you're playing on a field with a large area between the backstop and the plate and the ball gets to the backstop, you will not have a play at first. On fields with shorter distance backstops and on plays where the pitch bounces away from you, but does not reach the backstop,

you should be able to slide, stand, and throw to first for the out. Remember to get on the wild pitch as quickly as possible.

## Pop Ups/Fouls

**Situation:** a batter hits a popup around the home plate area.

**Solution:** immediately stand up, remove your mask, and locate the ball. Make sure to keep the mask in you throwing hand so you do not trip over it. Turn your back to the infield, as this makes it easier to field the popup. The physics of a popup dictate that the ball will always come back toward the field of play. Do not stand directly under the popup or it will land behind you. Stand so it looks like the ball will land a few yards in front of you. Read and react to the ball. It is easier to move forward on a ball than to backpedal. Once you are set, discard your mask by throwing it hard and to the right. Make sure it is far enough away as to not interfere with the play. Using both hands, catch the ball above your head. If there are runners on base, quickly turn and find them.

## Double Steals

There are two common situations where an opposing team might try to double steal. The first situation is with runners on first and second. The catcher has the option of throwing to either base. Know your base runners and the situation. Ideally, you want to get the lead runner at third. However, there are some advantages to throwing through to second for the trailing runner. First, he might not run as hard if he thinks the play is on the lead runner. Second, trailing runners will not have as good a jump. Third, you do not have to worry about throwing around a right-handed hitter.

The other situation where a double steal is most likely to occur is with a runner on first and third base. The offense as well as the defense has a lot of options. The offense may try and score the runner from third on a throw through to second. The defense, knowing this may try and cut down that runner at the plate or allow the throw through to second, get an out, and give up the run. Your coach should make the decision as to how to defend this situation.

Your main options as a catcher:

- Hold the ball and allow the runner to reach second.
- Throw through to second to get that runner.
- Fake to second and throw to third.
- Throw to third.
- Throw to a cut man (pitcher, 2nd baseman, Shortstop). Some teams will incorporate a cut play that involves a throw through to second base. It is up to the cut man (usually shortstop or 2nd baseman) to decide to cut the ball and make a play on the runner at third or let the ball go through to second base.

## **Dropped Third Strike**

A dropped third strike is really two different events. The first event is exactly as the title says; the catcher drops a third strike that was either a called strike or the batter swung and missed. The other event that can be considered a dropped third strike is on a ball that bounces in the dirt and the hitter swings and misses. The catcher must block this pitch so the hitter does not advance to first.

If either event takes place and first base is UNOCCUPIED, the hitter may advance to first. If first base is occupied with less than two outs, the hitter is out. However, be ready to make a play on the other base runners. The exception is with two outs. The hitter and all base runners may advance. As a catcher, you must either tag the runner before he runs or throw to first for the force out.

Always try and tag the runner before you attempt to throw to first. Make sure you clear the runner to the left or right before you throw. Do not try and throw over the runner. In the rare situation with the bases loaded, two outs, and a dropped third strike, you may also tag home because there is a force out at every base. See the section on throwing for more info.

## **Intentional Walks**

Throughout the course of a game, your coach may decide to intentionally walk a hitter. This is done for a number of reasons. Instead of squatting in your ready stance, stand up in the catcher's box. Depending on whether the hitter is in the left or right batters box, put out your opposite arm out to the side of your body. Be ready to move to the box you were pointing to. You do not have to give a sign other than extending your arm. The pitcher should know what is expected of him. As soon as the pitcher releases the ball, slide out to the side. The pitcher should deliver the pitch chest high and in the middle to outside of the opposite batters box (the box where you're at). The pitch should be far enough outside that the batter does not have a chance of hitting it. Catch the ball using both hands and return it to the pitcher. Repeat this process three more times.

## **Game Pace**

It is the job of the catcher to influence the pace of the game. Ideally, you want your pitcher to work quickly and throw as few pitches as possible. Some pitchers prefer to work slowly; you should know this ahead of time. If your pitcher is throwing well and hitting his spots, keep the game moving. Call your pitches as soon as the hitter steps in the box. If your pitcher is struggling, slow the pace down. Let him catch his breath and maybe call time and go have a talk with him. Help him build his confidence and get back into a rhythm.

## **Stealing Home**

This is a rare situation that you might never see in a game. When it does happen, the pitcher will be in the wind up and the runner will break on first movement by the pitcher. As the catcher, you will probably not see the runner break especially with a right-handed hitter at the plate. Listen to your teammates, they should be yelling. Receive the ball and quickly move to the left side of the plate, leading with your glove. Find the runner and apply the tag.

## Catcher's Guide Glossary

**Arm Band Drills** - drills designed to warm-up the shoulder before practice or a game. Also, these drills strengthen the rotator cuff and muscles of the shoulder.

**Arm Position** - this term refers to the correct positioning of the throwing arm in a ready or relaxed stance

**Blocking** - refers to the movement of the catcher attempting to stop and control a pitch in the dirt.

**Breaking Ball** - a pitch that changes direction in flight because of the spin created by the pitcher.

**Brush Back Pitch** - used to keep a hitter off of the plate. This pitch is useful to set up breaking pitches away.

**Bullpen** - an area where the pitcher warms up that is off of the field. Also, refers to a session where a pitcher throws a pre-determined number of pitches during practice.

**Bust the Hitter** - a pitch up and in with the purpose of jamming a hitter.

**Can Drills** - \*see Arm Band Drills.

**Catcher's Interference** - an instance during an at-bat where the catcher interferes with a batters swing. This usually happens when the bat on a swing tips the catcher's mitt. The result of the play depends on whether the pitch was hit and what happened as a result. For example: If the pitch was hit and the batter hit a double, the play stands. However, if the batter grounded out or maybe didn't make contact, he is awarded first base and any base runners advance one base.

**Chest Protector** - part of a catcher's set of equipment, it is a soft flexible covering for the chest. The purpose is to protect the catcher's chest from injury.

**Crossed Up** - a term used to describe a situation where, through miscommunication or a missed sign, the pitcher throws a different pitch than what the catcher called for.

**Cup and Jock Strap** - protection for the male body part.

**Dropped 3rd Strike** - refers to a situation with two strikes on the batter and the batter swings and misses on a pitch that bounces in the dirt or on a third strike, called or swinging, and the catcher drops the ball. The batter may advance to first if first base is unoccupied. The exception is with two outs all runners can advance.

**Dry Rotted** - term used to describe glove leather that has not been properly cared for.

**Foul Tip** - when a batter swings and barely makes contact with the pitch.

**Framing** - the art of the catcher making a borderline pitch appear to be a strike by moving the ball toward the strike zone.

**Grip** - Four Seam - the proper way to hold a baseball when attempting to throw.

**Jab Step** - one of the three main throwing styles described in throws to second.

**Mask** - Hockey Mask/Mask Helmet Combo - equipment used by the catcher to protect the head and neck.

**Mitt** - another term for a glove.

**Out Pitch** - usually the best pitch in a pitchers arsenal. It is the hardest pitch for the batter to hit hard.

**Overhand Position** - refers to the correct way to frame and catch a pitch low in the zone with the wrist pointed at the ground. More low pitches are called strikes when caught in the overhand position.

**Pick Off** - an attempt by either the pitcher or catcher to throw out a base runner that has too big a lead or too large a secondary lead.

**Pop Foul**s - pitches hit into the air that will land in foul territory. This term usually refers to balls hit around the infield.

**Ready Stance** - the position a catcher takes with runners on base and/or two strikes on the hitter. A raised squat.

**Receiving** - catching the ball

**Relaxed Stance** - the position a catcher takes with the bases empty and less than two strikes on the hitter.

**Replacement** - one of the three methods of throwing out base runners. See the throwing section for detailed info.

**Rock and Throw** - one of the three methods of throwing out base runners. See the throwing section for detailed info.

**Run Downs** - when a base runner gets caught up in-between two bases and the defense is trying to tag him out.

**Secondary Lead** - a secondary lead occurs after a runner has taken his normal lead and the pitcher delivers the ball to the plate. The runner then shuffles out a few steps and reacts to the result of the pitch.

**Shin Guards** - equipment worn by the catcher to protect the lower legs, knees, ankles, and feet. Made of a hard plastic and padded on the inside.

**Signs** - an important part of the communication between the catcher and pitcher. Pitch and location are usually given through the use of finger or body signals.

Also, signals are given by the catcher to fielders for various defensive situations.

**Slide - blocking** - the term used to describe the actions of a catcher attempting to block a pitch to the side.

**Square to Pitcher** - an important concept to remember for blocking, receiving, and framing pitches. It involves keeping your shoulders and hips parallel to the pitcher.

**Stance** - term used to describe the catchers positioning when catching a pitcher. There are two variations: ready and relaxed.

**Sticking Strikes** - an important part of receiving. This refers to catching a pitch that is a strike and keeping the strike where you caught it, not moving the glove.

**Umpire's Zone** - the strike zone an umpire is calling. This usually differs from a rulebook-defined strike zone.

**Underhand Position** - the improper way of catching a borderline pitch low in the zone. Your palm is facing up in this position.

**Waste Pitch** - the purpose is to set up the next pitch or series of pitches. A waste pitch is out of the strike zone.