

Catcher

The catcher is one of the most complex positions. The catcher is the only player who faces the entire field of play. Has the chance to direct the defensive play of the team. Leader of the team. Catcher can also help the pitcher, knowing the pitcher's ability from game to game, studying batters, and using knowledge and observations to exploit batters' weaknesses. The emotional state of a pitcher can greatly influence her performance. A good catcher works with her pitcher to bring out her best while keeping her in control. The catcher and pitcher must work as a team if they are to be successful.

Good catchers should have or need to develop:

- Agility with quick feet
- Strong arms and soft hands
- Quick reaction time and hustle
- Hard worker, Tough
- Should be very vocal
- Exceptionally strong knees and legs-bicycle riding is good
- Strong Core-when tired technique breaks down.
- Size (bigger and taller) for blocking the plate and catching high and wide pitches
- Leader of defense and pitching
- Student of the game

Equipment

- Glove: 1st base or softball catcher's glove-large pocket
- Mask, with throat protection: fits snugly and light weight (we require full helmets)
- Chest Protector: should not snag or slide around front. Protect shoulders, collarbone, and chest
- Shin Guards: should have flaps to protect top of foot and bottom of thigh. Fit tightly enough so they will not turn –fasteners to the outside

Stance

- Squat about 150 times per game- Save knees by squatting as far as possible with heels on ground and then forward to toes
- Feet: a little wider than shoulders. Weight on inside and the balls of the feet
- Position of feet: half step stagger with glove side foot forward. Back foot even with the instep of the front foot.
- Knees: slightly angled in
- Heels: may lightly touch ground
- Bottom: low as if sitting on a stool

Stance with Runners on

- Raise hips and bottom slightly
- Heels flat on ground
- Elbows in front and outside of knees
- 2 to 3 feet from batter's back leg
- Throwing hand: protect, behind back

Target

- Shows pitcher where to throw the ball
- Make glove as large as possible and keep still
- Body behind the glove, makes for a bigger target
- Adjust target if pitcher is missing zones

Catching the Ball

- Arm slightly bent
- Glove extended from the body
- Shoulders relaxed
- Glove elbow outside of knee
- Tip of glove towards center, easier transition on inside & out side pitches
- Wait for the ball to come to you, give with the catch.
- Try to catch ball with glove up
- Only in the case of extremely low balls do you attempt to catch with fingers down. This seldom earns a called strike.
- Advanced catchers (after giving a target) can point the fingers toward the pitcher and the palm down. This relaxes the wrist. When receiving the ball, will save the arm and hand while keeping the ball secure. React to the pitch not have pitch go just to a stationary target..
- Catcher focuses on the flight of the ball from the release until it is hit or caught. The catcher must not shut her eyes. She can force a blink before release so the eyes stay open during the flight of the pitch.
- Catch ball in web of glove
- Catcher must stay low until the umpire makes his call. Be sure not to obstruct the umpire's view. For balls out of the zone, catcher should shift her body but not her feet to make the catch. If the ball is further out, she steps in the direction of the ball and shuffles her feet to make the catch.

Framing

- Technique of catching the ball that is a marginal pitch. Push into the center of the strike zone. This helps to sell the pitch better as a strike. Catch as many low pitches with the palm down.

Blocking Balls

- Low balls that cannot be caught should always be blocked, even when there are no runners.
- Helps build confidence in the catcher, Helps to build confidence in the pitcher, and makes base runners more cautious.
- Catcher keeps body in front of the ball and ball in front of the body.
- Use equipment to block ball
- Drop to knees (shin guards as quickly as possible)
- Body should be in the shape of a C with shoulders forward, arms relaxed, Chin down, eyes on ball, both hands on the ground. Glove is used to protect the trap door (gap) between the legs. Bare hand is close by ready to grab for a throw or tag.
- Balls to side, hands initiate movement towards ball. Follow hands by jumping and landing on knees. Dive outside knee out and down. Body angled with belly button to the plate. Then balls rebound forward instead of sideways.

Passed Balls and Wild pitches

- Run hard to every ball
- Slide past balls
- Grab ball with both hands
- Locate player covering home by voice and look for waving arms. Urgency tone in voice may indicate how quickly the ball needs to be thrown.
- To make strong throw to plate, catcher stays low, steps with glove hand, and make a sharp underhand throw

The Throw

- Thump by thigh
- Elbows high
- Fingers to the sky
- Wave bye bye
- Transfer weight from back foot to front, pull down with left side and core
- It's a big arm circle
- With runner thumb by ear
- Receive with both hands
- Quickly separate the ball from glove
- Pitch offs-need good angles to target
 1. First rotate back foot step toward 1st
 2. Third step out with back foot plant

Throwing to bases

- Pivot: as the catcher receives the ball she immediately stands. The throwing hand foot is back to the heel of the glove hand foot in the catcher's stance. Catcher stands, plants weight on back foot. The glove foot strides towards the base. The body turns as the arm comes through and the back foot releases with the push off.
- Two Step: as the catcher receives the ball she immediately stands. She takes a short step with the throwing hand foot. The inside ankle should be pointed at the target. The glove hand foot should take a step directly at the target. The body turns as the arm comes through and the weight comes off the back foot with the push off.

Dropped Third

- Do not panic
- Know the count
- Find the ball
- Get a clear throw to bag without interfering with runner in runner's lane.
- Plant back foot (throwing side) Step with glove foot and snap the ball to first base.
- Work with first base to develop inside outside throws

Foul tips, Foul balls, Pop Ups

- Foul tip balls are still live
- key to catching foul tips is to be close to batter
- Usually inside foul tips on right handed batters will go to catcher's left and outside to the catchers right
- When catcher realizes the ball is fouled, she should stand and turn towards it
- Infields should help with verbal command up 3rd or Up 1. If the ball fades towards the infield 1st, 3rd, and pitcher should help attempting to make the play.

- If the facemask does not hinder vision leave it on, it's safer and easier. If the mask does hinder vision, locate the ball take off the mask and drop the mask far enough away that she will not step on it when fielding the pop up.
- Making the catch above the shoulders offers reaction time should the ball be bobbled.
- Use arm to clear umpire, if you need to get around them to get pop

Fielding Bunts

- First- hips and shoulder parallel to line, block with glove, push down on ball
- Third-get to ball quickly-pick up turn and throw

Holding Runners

- Let them see the fake
- Don't allow the runner too big a lead, may turn into a delayed steal
- If uncommitted OK to move towards runner make them commit. Have ball in hand ready to throw.

Covering Home Plate

- Force Play-look for double play to first or third
- Tags at the plate

Working with the Umpire

- Do not be confrontational
- Ask in a calm voice (looking forward, not facing umpire) if catcher is blocking umpire's view. How is the pitcher missing the plate
- Do not complain
- Adjust target to fit umpire's strike zone

Giving Signals

- Glove on left knee hides signal from 3rd base coach
- Right knee pointed at 2nd baseperson
- Signs back deep and up high

Calling Pitches

- Know your pitcher and pitches
- Study your opponents
- Exploit their weaknesses and compliment your pitcher's strengths

Summary Points

- Hustle on every Ball, including passed balls, covering first, all foul balls, and between innings. Catcher's alert aggressive play can set the tone for the team.
- Return the ball sharply to the pitcher. Don't lob it. Make sure she is ready.
- Learn to work with your pitcher. It is your job to bring out her best. You must learn how you work best together. You and the pitcher control most of the game.
- Block every ball even when the bases are empty. Doing so is good practice, develops catcher confidence, and gives the pitcher confidence that she can throw the any pitch even with runners on base.
- Work with the umpire. Keep your emotions under control. Never let others see you arguing or questioning a call. Ask questions to get the results you want.
- Be a team leader. All your teammates are looking to you. Use this to your team's advantage.
- Study your opponents at every available opportunity. Figure out how you can beat the batter and the team. One observation and one piece of information may make the difference.