



**REGINA
LAZERS
SOFTBALL
ASSOCIATION**

**COACHES
MANUAL**

Last revised: 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION	3
2.0	LAZERS OPERATING PRINCIPLES	4
	2.1 COACHING PRINCIPLES.....	4
	2.2 COACHING RESPONSIBILITIES	4
	2.3 COACHES' CONDUCT.....	5
3.0	PRESEASON – GETTING READY TO PLAY	6
4.0	GAME DAY PREPARATION	6
5.0	GENERAL SOFTBALL INFORMATION	7
	5.1 SOFTBALL ATTITUDE, DETERMINATION & FOCUS	7
	5.2 DEFENSIVE POSITIONS AND PLAY.....	8
6.0	PRACTICES – DEVELOPING SKILLS	12
	6.1 FIELDING.....	13
	6.1.1 Field, Throw and Run.....	13
	6.1.2 Countdown Drill.....	14
	6.1.3 Charging Drill	14
	6.1.4 Over The Shoulder Catch Drill	14
	6.1.5 Three 1 st Base Drill	14
	6.1.6 Point Game	15
	6.1.7 Golden Glove Drill.....	15
	6.1.8 Hitting/Fielding Drill	16
	6.2 BATTING.....	17
	6.2.1 Batting Stations	17
	6.2.2 Hip Turn Drill	19
	6.2.3 Player Afraid of the Pitch.....	19
	6.2.4 Rolling Away From a Pitch.....	19
	6.2.5 Bunting Drills.....	20
	6.3 BASE RUNNING	21
	6.3.1 Running Hard To 1 st	21
	6.3.2 Relay Races.....	21
	6.3.3 Aggressive Base Running.....	21
	6.3.4 Taking the Lead-off.....	21
	6.3.5 Teaching the slide.....	22
	6.3.6 Safe Sliding.....	23
	6.4 PITCHING	24
	6.4.1 So you want to be a Pitcher?	24
	6.4.2 Different Practices.....	24
	6.5 CATCHING.....	25
	6.5.1 Introduction	25
	6.5.2 EQUIPMENT	25
	6.5.3 POSITIONS	26
	6.6 COMBINATION DRILLS	31
	6.6.1 Defending Against The Steal	31
	6.6.2 Rundown Drills And Tips.....	31
7.0	SAMPLE PRACTICE PLANS	34

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In prior years the Lazers have had trouble providing enough coaches for the teams, especially in the “C” category. One of the reasons for this is that the coaches are generally parents and these parents were not comfortable being a ‘coach’. One of the main reasons for this was that they did not know enough about the game or about being teaching the game. They needed some guidance.

Therefore, one of the key objectives established for the Lazers was to provide guidance to coaching staff that would assist them in teaching the fundamentals of softball. A coaching manual became a top priority.

Many coaches contributed to this manual, either through offering their own advice and practice plans or through research of what they have seen in other leagues, with other coaches, from magazines or downloaded from the Internet. The Lazers thanks them for the effort required to pull together all of the material in this manual.

An effective manual is one that is used, before, during and after the season. We are always looking for tips, advice or practice drills that you have found effective in coaching. By sharing our best practices we can improve the quality of our Zone and create a lifelong enthusiasm for softball and sports amongst our young ladies.

If you have ideas that you would like to share please contact the Lazers Coach and Player Development Executive Member to have them incorporated in our next edition. In fact, feel free to contact anyone on the Lazers Executive.

Have fun!

2.0 LAZERS OPERATING PRINCIPLES

The Regina Lazers Softball Association has established several important objectives for the operation of their organization:

- To provide a fun experience for all participants at every age level.
- To create an environment of competitive softball that every player can enjoy.
- To provide guidance to coaching staff that will assist them in teaching the fundamentals of softball.
- To make our Zone as enjoyable as possible so that every player will return, year after year.

To achieve these objectives each coach in our Zone must focus on the most important stakeholder of all, the players. You will have the most impact on the experience that they will have with the Lazers and we are relying on your volunteer services to help us create a positive environment.

2.1 COACHING PRINCIPLES

You are one of the most influential people in a child's life. Your job is not only to teach how to hit a ball or make a play, but also to teach how to win and lose graciously. You must also remind them that the sport is meant to be FUN. The athletic skills these young girls learn from you may only be used for a few years. The attitudes they develop toward themselves and others will last a lifetime.

As a Coach your most important principles must be:

- To serve as a positive role model to your players, both on and off the field.
- To display good SPORTSMANSHIP in all cases, both as a winner and as a loser.
- To teach respect for all players, both their teammates and your competitors.
- To show respect for the rules, the officials and their decisions.
- To show leadership in building a team atmosphere, by using constructive advice and positive reinforcement.
- To help your athletes develop a positive self-image for themselves, no matter what their skill level.
- Give all your players an equal opportunity for all to learn skills and play different positions.
- Provide your players with the enthusiasm to continue a life-long participation in sport.
- To teach them that Softball can be competitive and fun. Don't ever let the competitive part destroy the fun part.

2.2 COACHING RESPONSIBILITIES

Each Coach has responsibilities that are important to fulfil in order to increase the enthusiasm of all Lazers players.

- To teach and improve each player's overall skills and those appropriate to the positions that they play. A Grassroots or Level 1 Coaching course is highly recommended. Studies have shown that even if a player has a losing season they will return if they believe that they have learned something and improved their level of play. It is highly recommended to have as many practices as possible throughout the season. We suggest that you schedule a practice on the game days that you do not play.
- Plan your practices in advance so that you know what drills that you will run based on what skills you need to improve. Keep the drills fun and involve as many players at once at all times. If practices are fun, players will attend and learn the necessary skills. A batting cage is available for booking; make use of at least a couple of times during the season.

- The coach is responsible for the conduct of the players, both on and off the diamond. Positive songs and cheering only. The coach is also responsible for the behaviour of his/her spectators (parents and/or friends). It is strongly advised that they inform all parents of the basic rules of softball for the division being played.
- The coach is responsible for the proper maintenance, care and control of all equipment in his/her care.
- To insure that his/her players adhere to all Regina Minor Softball League rules and regulations. The coach is responsible for maintaining the proper dress code for his/her players and coaches while on the field during games.
- At least one person from the coaching staff must be present in the dugout area or base coaching box during the game.
- For safety reasons, the coach must wait until all girls have left the park after any team function.

2.3 COACHES' CONDUCT

All Lazers Coaches shall:

- Refrain from using any language deemed unsuitable for use on a ball diamond.
- Refrain from attacking, either verbally or physically, any official, opponent, player or spectator. Coaches will treat Umpires with respect and will not subject them to any verbal or physical abuse. These situations will be treated with zero tolerance and will result in an immediate ejection and a subsequent one game suspension for the next scheduled game.
- Refrain from ANY unsportsmanlike behaviour. (i.e. disparaging or insulting remarks to players, officials, spectators, or committing any act that could be considered unsportsmanlike behaviour.)
- Refrain from smoking in the dugout area or on the diamond during the game.
- Not take or administer any drug not prescribed by a physician.
- Not represent Lazers in any capacity while unfit, due to the consumption of alcohol.
- All members of the managerial and coaching staffs of all teams sanctioned by the Lazers, are prohibited from consuming alcoholic beverages immediately prior to, during or immediately after any game or tournament play (more than one game played in a day).
- Report to the Lazers President any player:
 - Found in possession of non-prescribed drugs.
 - Under the influence of any non-prescribed drugs.
 - Found in the possession of alcohol in any form.
 - Found consuming alcohol in any form.
 - Found under the influence of alcohol.

Regina Lazers Softball Association will not accept or tolerate any behaviour judged to be degrading or unbecoming to the image of the organization.

3.0 PRESEASON – GETTING READY TO PLAY



Under
Construction

4.0 GAME DAY PREPARATION



Under
Construction

5.0 GENERAL SOFTBALL INFORMATION

5.1 SOFTBALL ATTITUDE, DETERMINATION & FOCUS

Team practice and coaching drills can help with the physical part of the game but coaches must also prepare your players for the mental part of softball. This section is written from the point of view of the player and you should consider providing it to your team as a handout at the beginning of the season.

What separates the average player from a good or great player is more a factor of their mental approach to the game rather than physical talent. There are lots of characteristics that the excellent player has but 3 of them are always present, **attitude**, **determination** and **focus**.

Attitude

This is all about being positive at all times during the game. For the individual player you have to be positive in all of your thoughts. If we are facing a tough pitcher, don't think or talk about striking out. Tell yourself you are going to get a hit. If we are in a tight game, don't be telling yourself that you don't want the ball hit to you. Tell yourself that you want the ball and you are going to make the play.

Visualize the kind of positive play that you want to make. Imagine yourself running full out and catching that fly ball or stopping the hard grounder and making the out. When you are in the on deck circle taking practice swings, visualize the hard single or double off of the toughest pitcher in the league.

It shouldn't matter if you are up by 10 runs or down by 10 runs, you should always stay positive. Teams that are up by 10 can look across the field and see a beaten team or one that is determined to play hard, every inning. You want to be part of a team that is feared because they never give up.

Determination

The next level up from a positive attitude is having determination on every play. Good players are positive that they can make the right play. Great players are determined that no ball will get by them, either in the field or at bat.

You can spot the great player easily, they play at full speed on every hit, they practice at game speed and they look like they will run down any ball hit near them.

On every pitch they automatically go into a crouch with gloves ready, knowing where they are going when the ball is hit. They are determined not to lose without a fight and they respect a good battle.

If the determined player makes a mistake, they get angry but they turn that anger into their own personal motivation to not let that happen again. That anger pushes them to play harder, not hold back. They don't fear making another mistake; they play more aggressively to show that it should not have happened in the first place.

Focus

Great players seem to instinctively know how a play will develop, before the average player. How do they do that? Typically they are focused on what is happening around them at all times. If they are playing an infield position, they know where the base runners are and if they are strong or weak runners. They know the count on the batter, they know how many are out and they know where they will play the ball if it gets to them. They keep track of the changes on every pitch and adjust their decision on what to do next.

You can improve your focus immediately. Start by noticing the little things that can make a difference. Watch the new pitcher and time your swings in the on deck circle. Watch the catcher during the warm up and game and see what kind of arm she has. Watch the infield practice and see if the 2nd or 3rd basemen is a weak fielder because it will be easier to steal against them.

Mentally Move Your Game Up A Notch

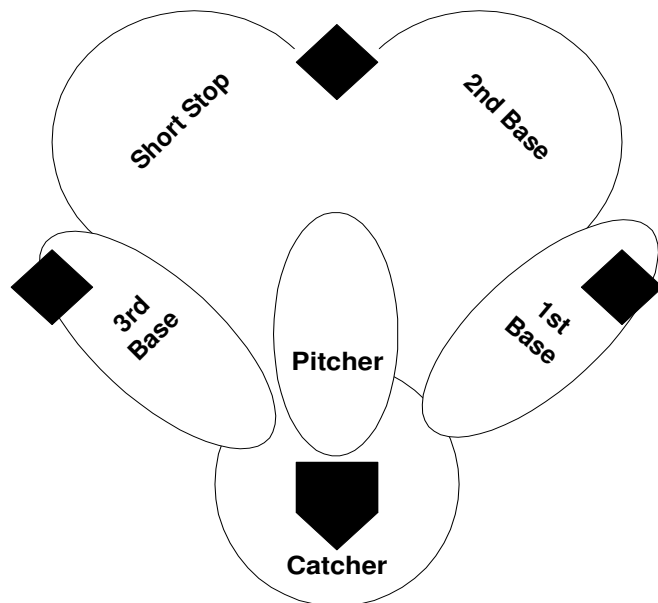
Can you change all these things overnight? No, this will take time and effort on your part. You have to approach every game with a positive attitude, determination to play your best every day and learn to focus your efforts. If you can slowly change your mental approach to the game you may not notice subtle changes in the way you play, but others will.

Soon simple plays, that may have caused you fear and stress in the past, will become automatic and instinctive. Over time you will find yourself getting to that hard hit grounder and making the out. Your range in getting to fly balls will increase. Your base stealing will start to feel easier. Over all you will begin to feel more confident and relaxed in tense situations. Start working on your mental attitude today and make yourself into a better ball player.

5.2 DEFENSIVE POSITIONS AND PLAY

For a team to have great defensive qualities requires that every player understand how they should play at certain positions, know the responsibilities of all the positions and how they contribute to team play.

The drawing below shows, in general, what each infielder is expected to cover. Outfielders fill in the gaps between the positions, and are moving to cover areas depending upon the batter and the speed of the pitcher. Also, the shortstop is responsible for the area behind 3rd base and into foul territory as the 2nd baseman is responsible for the area behind 1st base and into foul territory.



Every player should be following these general tips; no matter what position they are playing:

- Think about the situation before each pitch, and know where you are going if the ball is hit to you, or where to go if it is not. Make that decision before the pitch is thrown.
- Before every pitch you should be in your ready position. For infielders you are crouched over, glove down touching the ground facing the batter. For outfielders you are slightly bent at the waist, gloves held out in front.
- All players should be ready to move, sideways or front and back, as soon as the ball is hit. Don't hesitate or wait for the ball, charge it and make the right play.

More specific information on each position is outlined below:

Pitcher

The Pitcher, other than trying to strike out Batters, has to cover any balls hit up the middle and throws coming back into the diamond from the outfield. She also backs up the Catcher when defending Home.

The pitcher must provide backup to:

- Home, with a runner on 3rd, when the Catcher has to chase a bad pitch or missed catch.
- Home, to back up the Catcher when a base runner is caught in a run down between 3rd and home.

- 3rd when a base runner is caught in a run down between 3rd and 2nd.
- Home plate anytime the Catcher has to leave their position to make a play.
- Cut-off person, 2nd or SS, when a throw is coming in from the outfield.

Catcher

The Catcher has to have one of the strongest arms on the team, to be able to throw out runners at 2nd base. They also must be quick and agile to block softballs in the dirt and chase those that get by. Because of her position, having the whole field in front of her, she also has to be watching the field and yelling out instructions. She should be telling players where runners are and where throws should be going.

Necessary skills for the Catcher are:

- Focus, catching the ball while ignoring the batter and the swinging bat.
- Agility, being able to move quickly from the crouch to block a ball or make a throw.
- Throwing, hard and accurately to all the bases.
- Framing, the ability to move balls just outside the plate back into the strike zone.

She also provide backup to:

- 3rd, or 1st, when a throw is coming in to this position from the outfield (Pitcher takes over at home).

1st Base

The player at 1st does not need a strong arm but must have a sure glove. In an average game, approximately 80% of all infield plays will happen at 1st.

1st Base is responsible for all hits up the right side of the field, up the right foul line over to a couple of steps towards 2nd. Because they stand about 6 feet off of 1st, just inside the base line, they need to be quick to handle hits coming right at them.

She also will be alert whenever the batter has 2 strikes, to be ready in case of a dropped 3rd strike and a throw from the Catcher. She also should be covering her base whenever a runner is on 1st. After each pitch, and if there is no hit, she should go back to her bag and be ready for a throw from the Catcher who may be trying to pick the runner off. On a hit that gets into RF they should get to their bag and be ready for a throw, in case the RF is charging the ball and can make a play in time at 1st.

1st Base must provide backup to:

- Home plate anytime the Catcher has to leave their position to make a play.

2nd Base

2nd, along with the Short Stop, is responsible for covering a large portion of the infield. They must stop all hits between 2nd and a couple of steps from 1st. This means that they must be ready to move sideways quickly, and charge on any softly hit balls. They play halfway between 1st and 2nd, just behind the baseline.

2nd handles more ground balls than any other position, roughly twice as many as 1st, Short or 3rd. This means that they have to be steady and keep any hits from getting through. 2nd is the cut-off for any hits to the right side of the outfield. They will go out to the edge of the grass and be ready to take the throw from the fielder.

2nd will provide backup to:

- Pitcher, on any ball hit up the middle.
- 1st, anytime the 1st baseperson has to leave their bag to play a hit.
- SS, when they are taking the throw with a runner trying to steal 2nd. They will play back of the base about 10-15 feet to make sure that no wild throws get through.

Short Stop

Like 2nd, the Short Stop is responsible for covering a large portion of the left side of the infield. They must stop all hits between 2nd and a couple of steps from 3rd. This means that they must be ready to move sideways quickly, and charge on any softly hit balls. They also must have a strong accurate throw to reach 1st on grounders that they handle. They play halfway between 2nd and 3rd, just behind the baseline.

The SS is responsible for taking the throw at 2nd base on a steal. This is so 2nd can stay in position in case of hit. SS is the cut-off for any hits to the left side of the outfield. They will go out to the edge of the grass and be ready to take the throw from the fielder.

SS will provide backup to:

- Pitcher, on any ball hit up the middle.
- 3rd, anytime the 3rd baseperson has to leave their bag to play a hit.
- 3rd, when they are taking the throw with a runner trying to steal 3rd. They will play back of the base about 10-15 feet to make sure that no wild throws get through.

3rd Base

The player at 3rd must have a strong arm and be able to throw the ball hard and accurately across the diamond. 3rd is responsible for all hits up the left side of the field, up the left foul line over to a couple of steps towards 2nd. Because they stand about 6 feet off of 3rd, just inside the base line, they need to be quick to handle hits right at them.

She must be alert when the batter shows they are bunting. The moment they see the bunt motion, they must be charging Home to be ready to play the hit. She also should be covering her base whenever a runner is on 3rd. After each pitch, and if there is no hit, she should go back to her bag and be ready for a throw from the Catcher who may be trying to pick the runner off. 3rd must have a steady glove as the Catcher will be more aggressive in trying to pick off runners at this base.

3rd Base must provide backup to:

- SS, when they are going out to cut-off a throw from the infield.

Outfield

Outfielders are the last line of defence for the team. They must make sure that any hit that gets through the infield is stopped immediately. They also must make sure that any hit into their positions are caught and played back into the infield quickly.

Outfielders handle a lot of pop flies and must be able to get under them quickly and make sure catches. On high fly balls they should first take one step back and figure out where the ball is going. If they charge them too quickly they will end up running in too far and letting the ball get by. They have to run full out on every hit, not giving up and making every attempt to catch the ball. By being aggressive an outfielder can give a team 1-2 more outs every game.

Right Field must provide backup to:

- CF, on any ball hit up to this position. They must charge as soon as the ball is hit to be in position in case she misses it.
- 1st or 2nd, on any hard hit ball to these infielders. Again they must play the ball as if they expect the infielder to miss the hit, play aggressively.
- 1st, anytime there is a hit towards 3rd or SS the RF will back up the throw at 1st in case it is wild. This means they have to be moving as soon as they see the hit going to the left side of the field.

Center Field must provide backup to:

- SS or 2nd, on any hard hit ball to these infielders. Again they must play the ball as if they expect the infielder to miss the hit, play aggressively.
- RF or LF, on any ball hit up to these positions. They must charge as soon as the ball is hit to be in

position in case it is missed.

- 2nd, when they are taking the throw with a runner trying to steal. They will play back of the base about 10-15 feet to make sure that no wild throws get through.

Left Field must provide backup to:

- CF, on any ball hit up to this position. They must charge as soon as the ball is hit to be in position in case she misses it.
- 3rd or SS, on any hard hit ball to these infielders. Again they must play the ball as if they expect the infielder to miss the hit, play aggressively.
- 3rd, anytime there is a throw from the right side of the diamond to this base. They will be making sure that wild throws are backed up. This means that they must be anticipating this play and moving quickly to be in position.
- 3rd, when they are taking the throw with a runner trying to steal 3rd. They will play back of the base about 10-15 feet to make sure that no wild throws get through.

6.0 PRACTICES – DEVELOPING SKILLS

The softball season is unlike any other season. Mothers and fathers sneak out of work early, families rush through dinner, or don't eat before 8:30 and the laundry room is active day and night. Getting players to attend your practices will be your first challenge. One of the best ways to encourage them to show up is to make it fun and give them the opportunity to improve their skills. Some tips to making practices as interesting as the games:

- Make the time convenient for both the player and the parents. It will always be difficult to attract players on Friday nights and weekends because they, or their parents, will likely have plans.
- Practices don't have to be long to be good. You can accomplish a lot in 90 minutes with 5 or 6 short but effective drills. Mix long and short drills to have variety and take a couple of minutes in between to stress the key messages of the drill just completed. This type of practice means that you have to be prepared by showing up with a practice plan, knowing what drills you are going to run before you get to the diamond.
- Don't confuse activity with accomplishment. How many coaches spend most of the practice throwing batting practice to their players, with most of the team standing around either waiting to hit or standing in the field waiting to come in. Use a variety of drills to get the entire team involved. Run multiple batting drills (off of a tee, hitting plastic golf balls, soft toss and throwing regular batting practice) all at the same time, each with a specific purpose and getting more players in the action. If you have players standing around - they aren't learning and they are likely bored.
- If you plan five to seven drills of ten to fifteen minutes in length for each practice, the players will be more attentive and less bored. Don't worry about players not liking certain drills. About a third of the way through the season they will let you know which ones to weed out.

The practice drills contained in this section have been submitted by several coaches, collected from other coaching manuals or taken from the Internet. The drills are intended to give you a head start on building a practice plan early in the season. When using these drills please keep the following in mind:

- Adjust the drills according to the age of the players and the skill of your team. Don't try complex drills with young or inexperienced players or it may result in frustration or injuries.
- Never pass up a chance to make any drill into a game or competition, players learn faster and have more fun.
- Demonstrate properly how the drill should be done and make sure that everyone is clear before you start. Bad practice habits can result in poor play in a game.
- Point out the little things that will make a difference between a poor play and a solid one.
- If the drill is going poorly, stop and explain things again. Be positive when you are pointing out what needs to be improved.
- Focus on the whole team; don't single out a player in front of everyone to tell her what she is doing wrong. Take them aside and provide constructive criticism, not destructive.
- Be patient and don't lose your temper, remember these are kids out to have a good time – they are not professional ball players.

6.1 FIELDING

Coaching Tips for Fielding

A major defensive skill is catching. This includes catching a thrown ball, fielding grounders and running down a fly ball. Initially, some players will be afraid of catching a baseball. That fear will make them flinch right before the ball reaches the glove. They'll end up dropping the ball instead of catching it, or, worse, the ball may hit them. By that time, they may be ready to quit.

Teaching players the correct catching technique is not easy. You must first overcome their fear of getting hit by a hard ball. That's why it's so much better to start kids with safety balls that don't hurt. Players can miss the ball, even get conked on the head with it, and not wind up with a big bump and bruise. When your players have mastered catching the safety ball, you can introduce easy catching with the regulation softball.

To catch a ball, the player should position the glove according to the flight of the ball. If the ball is below the waist, the fingers and the palm of the glove hand should be pointed down with the mitt fully open. If the ball is chest high, the fingers and the palm of the glove should be pointing out. If the ball is above the chest, the fingers point toward the sky. In all catching attempts, a player should:

- Keep eyes on the ball.
- Have both hands ready, with arms relaxed and extended towards the ball.
- Bend the elbows to absorb the force of the throw.
- Watch the ball into the glove and squeeze it.
- After the catch, the player should immediately grip the ball with the throwing hand in the correct overhand throwing technique.

6.1.1 Field, Throw and Run

This drill helps with the basic fundamentals such as getting into a proper fielding position, lateral movement, throwing, and lots of running. It also has the advantage of working indoors as well as outdoors and every player can participate.

Have three players line up 40 to 75 feet from the rest of the group; the distance depends upon the age or experience level. The first player in the line has a ball and starts the drill. The rest of the group should line up slightly to the side so the 1st fielder has room to run left or right.

The player with the ball throws it on the ground to the first player on the other side. They will field it properly and throw it back to the second player in the first line, and run over to join the first line. The player who threw the grounder should run to the other line after their throw. The drill continues with players throwing grounders to the other side, receiving throws and running back and forth until everybody is dead tired. In short, one player is throwing a grounder and running to the other side. The fielder is catching the grounder and throwing it right back to the next player in the line, and then running to the other side.

By only putting 3 players on the other side you are forcing the players to run to be in position to keep the drill moving quickly.

6.1.2 Countdown Drill

This is a fun drill to help players develop good hands, quick release, and hustle to a loose ball. Have the players line up across from a partner about 20 feet apart. They are to make good throws back and forth as many times as they can while the coach counts down from 30 to zero. The player who does not have the ball at zero wins. Players will scramble for a dropped, or passed ball and get it quickly back to their partner.

6.1.3 Charging Drill

This drill is intended to improve the player's ability to charge a softly hit ground ball. Put the players about 50 to 80 feet away from the coach (depending upon age or experience). With more than one coach you can split the team up and run the drill quickly. The coach throws a ground ball so that the player has to charge the ball at about the midway point between. They field the ball and throw it cleanly back to the coach and jogs off to the side and back to the end of the line.

One side throws a ground ball so that the player on the other side has to charge the ball at about the midway point between the groups. The player fielding the ball throws the ball back to the tosser, turns to the right, and jogs back to the end of the line.

A variation of this drill would be to split the team into two, one side becomes the throwers and the other the fielders. The thrower tosses a grounder so that the fielder has to charge the ball at about the midway point. As soon as the thrower releases the ball they would go to the end of the fielding line. Once the fielder catches the ball and throws it back, they will go to the end of the throwing line.

6.1.4 Over The Shoulder Catch Drill

This drill will improve the player's ability to catch a fly ball over the shoulder. The drill can have as many tossers as desired. The drill can have 4 or more players in each line. Each player has a ball.

The tosser stands on the left side of the player. The player hands the ball to the tosser, then runs out, and the tosser leads with a fly ball so that the player has to reach to catch the ball over the left shoulder. After catching or retrieving the ball, the player turns to the left, and jogs back to the end of the line. Vary this drill so that players rotate as tosser and fielder and make sure to have all players also work on fielding fly balls over the right and left shoulder.

6.1.5 Three 1st Base Drill

This drill will give your infielders lots of practice on ground balls and throwing to first, in a short period of time.

This drill utilizes three First Bases. Place a throw down base approximately 40' from home plate, another at 60', then place a third bag 20' farther down the line. 3 coaches are positioned near home plate with a bucket of balls. One coach hits grounders to the third baseman and they throw to the bag at 40'. Another coach hits to the shortstop and they throw to the bag at 60'. The third coach hits to the second baseperson and they throw to the bag at 80'. It may sound confusing, and a lot is going on with three coaches hitting grounders at the same time, but a tremendous amount gets accomplished. Each infielder will get numerous ground balls and throws across the diamond.

Additional Drill Organization:

- Each first baseman can have a bucket to toss softballs into, or if you have limited balls, they can "lazy toss" back to the coach.
- You may not have three 1st basepersons. Adapt and use additional players, such as a catcher, for this particular drill.
- Each time you do this drill you might focus on something different such as ground balls to the left, ground balls to the right, slow rollers, etc. Or you can alternate during the drill, spending 3-4 minutes on each type of ground ball.
- Don't forget the value of this drill to your first baseperson. They should be working on proper stretch, scooping balls in the dirt, tagging down on a high throw as they would in a game, etc.

6.1.6 Point Game

Split your team up into A and B teams. Have the A team spread out between second and third base and the B team spread out between second base and first base. The coach will hit ground balls from home plate to each team's side. If a ball gets through on either side of the infield and makes it to the outfield grass, then that team receives a point. First team with ten points loses. With some competition the players will get really aggressive (diving) going after the ball. With this drill the coach should be stressing the importance of backing up one another when fielding a ground ball.

6.1.7 Golden Glove Drill

This drill is designed to quicken reaction time to grounders and line drives using lateral movement. It is a great drill to run at the end of each practice and gets the entire team competing in a contest to see which player fields the most hits.

One variation is to have players take a turn standing with the chain link fence at their back. Set a distance on either side that they have to cover, from 10 feet to 20 feet depending upon the age and skill level of your players. The coach stands about 40 feet away and hits grounders and line drives to the left and the right, up and down. The player is trying to make sure that they stop the ball so that it does not get past them. They don't have to catch the ball cleanly but only have to stop it from getting by. They each take a turn, stopping the ball or fielding it cleanly, and must make an accurate throw back to a catcher who is standing beside the coach hitting. The player is knocked out of the game if a ball gets past them to the fence, within the span area, or if they make a bad throw back to the catcher. Have the catcher set one foot on a base and if they have to move it to catch the throw then the player is eliminated. As players are eliminated, make the ground balls faster and tougher to those who are left.

A second variation is to involve two players in the drill. It teaches the importance of having a back-up and staying alert. Put two bases down about 40 feet away from home plate. The bases will set the limits of the area that you want the player to cover. Have one player stand just on the line between the bases and the second player about 4-5 paces behind. The rest of the players stand behind them in the outfield. The coach and the catcher will be at home plate. The catcher will use home plate to set their foot for the throws. The coach hits grounders to the first player who must stop the ball from getting by them. The first player makes the stop and throws accurately back to the catcher at home. The backup moves up to take the first position and the next player in line becomes the backup. A player is eliminated if they miss the ball or make a poor throw back to the catcher. The back-up player must stay alert and make the stop if the first player missed it. If the backup misses the ball, or makes a poor throw back to the catcher, then they are eliminated too. The last player in the game to make a stop and throw accurately back to the catcher wins.

6.1.8 Hitting/Fielding Drill

This drill will provide players with an opportunity to field a large number of ground balls and work on their timing for hitting. It is a great drill to keep groups of 3 to 4 players occupied and productive while one coach works with the pitchers and catchers on other drills.

For this drill you have one or two fielders, who are 60 feet in front of hitter, and one catcher, who stands on the right side of the hitter. You can have as many groups as desired.

The hitter hits 10 ground balls to the fielder who throws accurately back to the catcher. After fielding the 10 ground balls, the fielder becomes the catcher, the catcher becomes the hitter, and the hitter becomes the new fielder. In a 4-person group the second fielder becomes the backup and is worked into the player rotation. The drill continues to proceed in this manner for as long as desired.

6.2 BATTING

Coaching Tips for Batting

Hitting is the fun part of the game. Certain softball positions demand some real athletic ability but with practice almost everyone can be an effective hitter.

Some basics that coaches should look for in developing good hitting techniques for your players:

- Make sure that your player selects the right bat for them. Standing at the plate in their normal position it should be long enough that it allows them to easily reach the far side of the plate without having to bend or stretch. It should be light enough that they can easily and quickly get it around on a pitch. Bat speed determines how hard the ball is hit and most batters will benefit from a lighter bat.
- Their stance should be neutral in the box. If you drew a line through the tops of their toes it should be parallel to the plate and point straight out to centre field. If it points away from the plate then that is an open stance and towards the plate is a closed stance.
- For most pitches the front foot should be lined up with the middle of the plate. For fast pitchers they will move back in the batter's box and with slower pitchers they can move up. If they know that they are behind on the pitch, they should move back. If they are ahead of it, then they would move up.
- They should feel comfortable and balanced on their feet, with their weight slightly on their back foot.
- The back foot stays steady and is the one that the batter will drive off of. The front foot will take a slight slide step towards the pitcher. A big step with the front foot will affect timing and likely throw them off balance.
- The bat should be held lightly in the batter's grip. If they are holding the bat too tightly then they will not get proper wrist action as they swing.
- As the ball is coming in they should be concentrating on the ball coming out of the pitchers hand and then focusing on the laces. If they are seeing the ball well they will be able to see the laces spinning as the ball is coming in, this will help them keep their head on the ball as they swing.
- The batter should only be taking the bat forward in their swing. If they are "winding up" and taking the bat back before coming forward then they may be behind on every pitch.
- The batter should start the swing by throwing the butt end of the handle at the ball coming in and then following through by rolling their wrists. By aiming the end of the handle at the ball they will be concentrating on a flat swing and leading with their hands, both necessary for quick hard hits.
- The swing should finish with an aggressive hip turn as they follow through. This will give them extra power on their hits.

6.2.1 Batting Stations

To involve all of your players you can run 2 or 3 batting stations at the same time so that there are no players standing around. You can usually get away with 3 fielders who are retrieving hit balls and the rest can be involved in hitting drills. The batters can move from station to station and then rotate out to become a fielder. You can also have all of the batters, who are hitting softballs, hit out to the fielders so that they are getting lots of work chasing down hits. This means that the fielders have to be alert as you may have 2 or 3 hitters working at different stations at once.

Station 1 - Hitting off of a Tee

By hitting off of a tee you remove the pressure of having to time the swing to hit the pitch. The coach should be looking for good mechanics and making sure that the batter is making contact directly or slightly on top of the ball. If they are hitting under, and popping up the ball, then they are likely dropping their hands or back shoulder. The batter can hit 15-20 balls in short succession and the coach can point out improvements.

Station 2 – Hitting Plastic Golf Balls

The coach will take 10 to 15 plastic golf balls (also known as whiffle balls) and pitch overhand, from one knee, to the batter. You can use a thin bat or even a broomstick. The pitches should be fairly hard as this will improve the batter's hand and bat speed. The batter has to focus on the small plastic balls to be able to hit them consistently. Develops hand and eye coordination.

Station 3 – Soft Toss

Soft toss gets the batter warmed up before they go to the plate for full hitting drills. It can also be an effective pre-game drill to have your players hit into a screen or fence.

The usual position for the coach is to the side, with the batter facing them, and slightly to the front of the plate. The coach lightly tosses the ball into the strike zone and the batter hits the ball. The coach can vary the tosses easily to make sure that the player is focusing on the ball. There are other variations that can help your batters improve:

- Have the player practice hitting with one hand on the bat, and then alternate to the other. This will force them to increase their bat speed to get good hits.
- Juggle or rotate your hands holding two balls and toss them in an inconsistent sporadic pattern. This develops bat speed upon eye contact. Eventually the more experienced hitter could be tossed fakes as well. While the tosser is spinning the ball they actually fake twice and then releases one.
- Hold two balls, one on top of the other. Toss both balls so that they stacked one upon the other. As you release the balls to toss them, call out top or bottom. This forces the hitter to actually think about which ball to hit upon a command. This will also fine-tune their concentration.
- Rapid Fire, use 3 balls and soft toss one after the other immediately upon contact. This develops quick hands.
- The coach should stand up close to the plate but just out of bat distance. They hold the ball high in the air above the front part of the plate and drop the ball. The batter, depending on his eyes to initiate the swing, has to hit the ball before it touches the ground. Their technique is critical in this drill. Make sure their step, hips, balance, and head are all in correct form.
- The coach is on one knee about 5 or 6 feet behind the hitter tossing the ball through the hitter's strike zone. The batter has to accelerate his bat after the ball. The batter can look at the coach for the first few tosses, but then must do it blindly. This develops quick hands and follow through for overall power.

Fatigue develops bad habits so make sure the hitter gets a chance to rest and don't try to run through all of these variations at once.

Station 4 – Regular Hitting

For the final station the coach, or your pitcher if they are consistent, will pitch to the batter. The fielders will chase down hits and soft toss or roll the ball back to the pitcher.

6.2.2 Hip Turn Drill

This is a drill to develop quicker hips and the relationship of hip speed to the entire swing. Place a bat behind the waist, horizontal to the ground, and use a glove as home plate. While holding the ends of the bat in the hands, assume a normal batting stance and soft toss a ball. The batter will execute a stride and must turn their hips to swing the bat. This drill will teach them to turn the hips faster and finish in the proper contact point position.

6.2.3 Player Afraid of the Pitch

If you have a batter who is backing out or stepping out toward third base you need to give them more time facing pitches so that they will get comfortable. If you have your pitchers practicing have your timid batter stand in the batters box without a bat. This will help a new or inexperienced pitcher gradually used to the idea of pitching to a batter, or getting a new catcher used to the idea of having that bat swinging around in his peripheral vision). At these times, choose one of your more timid kids to stand in, and have them concentrate on watching the pitch closely all the way. This gives him a chance to practice this without the pressure of trying to hit the ball.

6.2.4 Rolling Away From a Pitch

Fear of the baseball is often one of the biggest obstacles to good hitting. It can lead to stepping back or out when swinging, poor balance and pulling the head off the ball. Although it's normal to have a healthy respect for the pitch, abnormal fear of being hit by the ball can cripple an otherwise good hitter. Any player who has trouble rolling away from a pitch thrown at him (i.e., turning toward the catcher so the ball will hit them on the backside) needs to practice this drill until it becomes natural.

First explain the importance of rolling away from a pitched ball. Ask the players if they would rather be hit in the face, throat, stomach, groin or back. If they are smart, most will agree on being hit in the back. Demonstrate how to roll away, then proceed with the drill.

Find a fence or backstop the hitter can stand behind. It must be high and wide enough so she cannot be hit with a ball thrown from the other side. The hitter stands behind the fence with a bat. The pitcher stands pitching distance away on the other side of the fence (the fence separates the 2). Place a glove or portable base down (on the batter's side) to act as home plate while making sure to leave enough room for the batter to take a full swing. The pitcher throws to the plate and the batter swings normally (if the pitch is a strike). Of course she won't make contact with the ball because it will be stopped by the fence before it reaches her. Throw a few strikes initially then randomly throw directly at the fence in front of the hitter. Don't hold back, let it fly.

Vary the location and be sure to mix it up so the hitter doesn't get into a habit of turning away every time (make sure she continues to swing at strikes). Throw at different parts of the body (including just behind the head) and watch for proper reaction. Repeat this drill until the hitter's natural reaction is to turn away.

6.2.5 Bunting Drills

When your team is taking batting practice, mark out an area 10 feet directly in front of home plate over to 10 feet down the 3rd baseline. At the beginning of each batters turn give them 5 bunts before their regular swings. For each bunt that goes into the area marked the player earns two extra swings. This will motivate the players to focus when they bunt.

Another effective drill is one-handed bunting. The player grips bat with the top hand at the balance point of the bat, then bunts that way. All the things you try to teach such as grip, bat angle, 'catch the ball with the bat', etc. happen naturally just by bunting one handed. It is a simple finishing job to add the bottom hand to steer the ball, and leads easily into drag and push bunts. A few minutes of practice will improve their bunting skills and leaves that much more time to hit.

6.3 BASE RUNNING

6.3.1 Running Hard To 1st.

Many players slow down before they get to first base instead of running through the bag. During practice, place another base about 15 feet past first. This way they keep up their speed through the first when running to the bag.

Here is another drill that will get the point across. Have one coach stand at shortstop and another at 1st base. Have each player, with helmets on, stand at home with a softball. The player will throw a grounder right at the coach at short and try to beat the throw to 1st base. Go through this drill once or twice and you will notice players watching their throw and the play to 1st. Point this out and instruct them to focus on 1st and run through the orange base. They should improve during the second round by not watching the play.

6.3.2 Relay Races

Split the team in half, with one group of players behind home plate and other half behind second base. Give the first base runner of each group a ball (this will be the "baton" for the relay race). At "GO!" the first player from each team begins running the bases, ball in hand. After making a complete lap around the bases (back to each group's starting point), that base runner hands the ball off to the next in line, who continues the relay race. First group of players to finish the race wins.

For a variation on the relay race each player wear their glove and hold two baseballs in it (one of which gets handed off to the next runner). This will teach the base runners the importance of squeezing the glove to hold the softball.

6.3.3 Aggressive Base Running

This is a very aggressive base running drill that should only be used with players who know how to slide properly. Base runners start at home plate. They run to 1st and round the base properly taking a wide, aggressive turn, stop and slide back into the bag. The base runner gets up quickly, takes an aggressive lead, takes off to steal 2nd sliding into the bag. Runner then gets up takes an aggressive secondary lead and slides back into the bag. The base runner then steals third repeating the slide, getting up and taking an aggressive lead off third, in foul ground, slides back into the bag, coming back on the foul line. They get up and sprint home (no slide at plate). The next runner takes off from home when the previous runner completes his slide into first and touches the bag.

The focus of this drill is to make base runners very aggressive and not be afraid to get dirty! It also gets players practice in sliding properly. It also tends to develop players who want to work hard and get dirty.

6.3.4 Taking the Lead-off

This drill will teach base runners to come off of the base aggressively as soon as the pitch crosses the plate, or leaves the pitchers hand, depending upon the division. You need a pitcher, a catcher and a first baseman and one base runner with batting helmet (at first base). The remaining players line up in foul territory to take their turn running. To begin the pitcher pitches to the catcher and the catcher makes a throw to first base to try to catch the base runner coming off of the bag to go to second base.

The object is for the base runner to take their lead-off and get as far as possible toward second base (but not to go to second) and then try to get safely back to first before the throw. Mark a line in the dirt at the farthest distance that each player gets to - only if they get back to first safely. That teaches the base runner how far they can get off the bag and still get back during a regular game. You can have a competition to see who can get the farthest. Base runners may have to slide back to first if they learn to be really aggressive. It's important when you finish the competition to review each base runner's mark and have them stride off the distance. This will let them have an idea how far to come off the bag.

The aim is to get the base runner to come off the bag far enough to take advantage of any dropped balls by the catcher. The drill is a good workout for the pitcher, catcher and first baseman. Switch the drill to third base for some variety and to give your other infielders some valuable defensive practice.

6.3.5 Teaching the slide

Sliding is one of the most important offensive skills that a team must have to be aggressive and manufacture runs. It is difficult to learn how to slide in game situations so practice drills are a must. Teaching the slide does not have to be difficult if it is done in steps.

Step 1

Start by getting all the players to sit on the ground in the final position they end up in sliding to a base. Their right leg should be extended straight out and their left leg folded beneath it, left ankle underneath the right knee. They will then lean back as far as possible with their hands extended out from their body and slightly behind them. Get them comfortable with how this position feels. Stress that they will be sliding with their left calf and upper thigh taking most of the weight. Remember all of this is likely reversed for a left-handed player.

Step 2

The next step is to slowly take two steps and practice sliding into that final position. This will get them comfortable with how to properly extend their right leg and fold their left underneath. Have them repeat this 8-10 times until they begin to get smoother. The players should realize that they will not get really smooth until they are running and get some momentum that will assist them in sliding properly.

Step 3

Now have the players run from about 20 feet, at about half-speed, and slide into the bag. The coach should be looking for possible problems with the slide and immediately taking the player aside and pointing out what improve. Look for players who are jumping in the air as they slide, and landing too hard. If a player is not getting it right away, back up to Step 1 or 2 and start again.

Step 4

Once your players are comfortable with Step 3, have them practice sliding at almost full speed. Add two players, one with a foot behind the bag to try and tag the runner and a fielder who will throw softballs to them. Make sure that the player has their foot behind or beside the bag, not on top or in front or else they might get spiked. As the player is sliding the fielder will try and catch the softball and take the glove low to tag the runner. The runner should be working on sliding directly to the base and staying underneath the tag. Good practice for sliding and tagging. Make sure that the base runners have their helmets on.

The first couple of times that you run this drill you will likely use all 4 steps. After that just using steps 3 and 4 can make this an effective 10-minute drill where everyone can get some important sliding practice. Make sure that you do not run this drill for too long as it can lead to injuries.

6.3.6 Safe Sliding

If you do not have access to a proper softball diamond when practicing sliding try using a large piece of cardboard placed on grass. Have the kids start their slide hitting the piece of cardboard. This causes the cardboard to slide on the grass instead of the kid so there is less chance for injury or abrasion or maybe snagging a cleat or shoe in the grass. Use a stick of some kind as sort of limbo bar and have them slide under it to make sure they stay as low as possible. Make sure they practice good form (slide more on your back than side and keep the hands up and back). Always wear batting helmets when practicing sliding.

6.4 PITCHING

6.4.1 So you want to be a Pitcher?



Softball can be an exciting and challenging game at any position but one of the most challenging roles on the team is that of the Pitcher. Together with the Catcher, the Pitcher has one of the most important defensive jobs on the team.

Anyone can be a Pitcher, with the right attitude and work ethic. Athletic ability is not critical but learning good mechanics and working hard to improve is very important. Also important is how you handle the job in your mind when you are standing on the rubber. You have to stay positive and cool under pressure, don't let the cheering get to you and be ready to learn from your mistakes.

From a mental point of view a Pitcher needs to be one of the most positive on the team. When you first start out you are going to throw a lot of balls and walk quite a few batters. Don't let this get you down – with lots of practice and determination you will get better. Stay positive and concentrate on the next batter, not the one you just faced. Think about your good pitches and forget about the bad ones, focus on getting better.

From a physical point of view to be the 1st or 2nd Pitcher on your team will require practice, lots of it. You should expect to practice at least 3 or 4 times a week, outside of a game, and throw a minimum of 50-75 pitches during each practice session. If you want to be an All Star or Rep pitcher you should count on doubling that amount of work, throwing 100 pitches every day.

Therefore it is very important that you find someone to support and help you during your practices. You need a catcher (a parent, brother or sister, friend or neighbour) who is willing to help you practice when you want to, and sometimes push you when you don't. Your practice catcher should be someone who will watch your mechanics and help you make adjustments. They need to be positive and provide motivation to help you improve. And they need to vary the practice methods to keep you from getting bored and make it fun! During our Pitching clinics we stress the proper mechanics and your practice catcher and you can learn a lot about the right way to throw a pitch.

When you think you're ready talk to your Coach about pitching an inning and seeing if you enjoy it. Remember, he will be asking you if you are practicing. If you don't keep up your practice then it is not fair to the team and other Pitchers to let you take on this important role. The team depends upon the Pitcher and they need someone who is preparing them selves to be their best.

6.4.2 Different Practices

Simulate Game Conditions – Pretend you are pitching in a game situation. Have your catcher call balls & strikes and let you know if you are walking the batter, or striking them out. If you throw too many balls, walking the batters, you will load the bases and then walk in runs. The goal is to strike out three before loading the bases and moving on to the next inning.

Balls & Strikes – As you are pitching, have your catcher call balls & strikes. Keep track to see how many of your 50-75 practice pitches are strikes and work to improve your scores. This will help you to focus on throwing strikes.

Target Pitching – Have your catcher move their glove around in the strike zone. Have them hold their glove high and right for 5 pitches, high and left for 5 more and then 5 more low on both sides of the plate. As you get better you will want to be able to throw pitches inside, outside and to different spots around Home Plate, depending upon the batters abilities. This drill will help you develop control so you can mix up your pitches and confuse batters.

6.5 CATCHING

6.5.1 Introduction

Defensively, catching is one of the most important positions on the team. Young players should be taught proper technique and safety early in their career. The focus of this chapter is on the basics of proper positioning, and use of safe equipment.

If you coach novices or very young players, one of your toughest assignments will be convincing one of them to be the catcher. The material in this section will help provide what you need to recruit a suitable catcher, and train that player to enjoy the role.

At the end of this section, you should be able to

- Identify the important items of catching equipment and the purpose of each.
- Demonstrate the following catching positions:
 - Signal position
 - Target position - bases empty
 - Target position - runners on base
- Instruct your catcher on how to be positioned in the catcher's box.
- Demonstrate and instruct your catcher how to throw to a base.
- Demonstrate and instruct your catcher how to make a tag at home plate.
- Demonstrate and instruct your catcher how to catch a pop fly.

6.5.2 EQUIPMENT

The highest potential for injury of all softball positions is at the catching position. Nevertheless, with well-suited and proper fitting protective gear, it can be a very safe and enjoyable position to play. Here are the main items of equipment required.

- The MASK protects the face from foul balls and stray bats, and is mandatory for all levels of softball.
- The CHEST PROTECTOR guards the chest and internal organs against foul balls, stray bats, and collisions with runners. Chest protectors are mandatory for all categories of women's play, and for boys in minor softball.
- SHIN GUARDS protect the shins, knees, and ankles against foul balls, stray bats, and collision with runners and cleats. Shin guards are mandatory in minor softball, but are advisable for all levels.
- The CATCHER'S HELMET protects the head from foul balls (especially those bouncing off the backstop) and bats. They are mandatory in all levels.
- A THROAT PROTECTOR guards the throat from foul balls, and is mandatory.
- A PROTECTIVE CUP protects the testicles (men), and there is a similar protective device for women. A cup is mandatory for all minor league players.
- The CATCHER'S GLOVE also serves as a protective device. It should fit comfortably, be well padded and easily controlled by the catcher.

When choosing equipment for your team, keep in mind the following variables:

- Fit
- Weight
- Size
- Materials used
- Design
- The last thing to consider should be the price of the equipment.

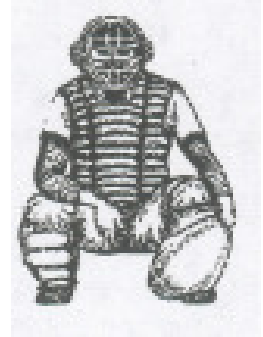
6.5.3 POSITIONS

At this level, the two primary functions of the catcher are: giving the signal, and giving the target (i.e. telling the pitcher what to throw, and where to throw it).

THE SIGNAL

When giving a signal, the catcher squats with the heels off the ground, and knees slightly apart. It's a good idea for the catcher to develop the habit of squatting with the knees in line with the edges of home plate. This will help conceal the signal, and also serve as a useful target for the pitcher

The object of the signal position is to flash the signal to the pitcher while keeping it concealed from the opposition. Generally, the signal is given in the crotch area with the free hand. The glove hand is placed below the corresponding knee to block the view of the base coaches and/or runners. It is preferable to give the signal against the inside of the thigh rather than in the crotch. In minor ball, the target itself could be the signal.

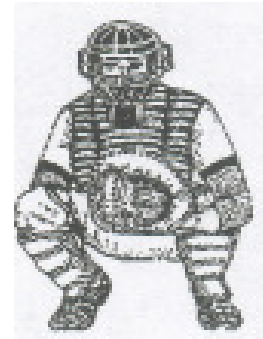


After giving the signal, the catcher must consider the presence of base runners when setting the target.

TARGET POSITION - BASES EMPTY

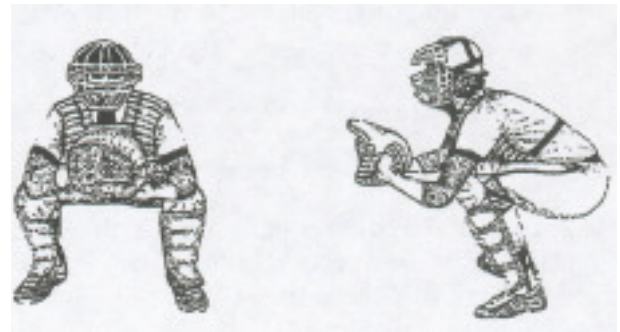
With nobody on base, the catcher can afford to receive the ball with one hand (except on a third strike). For this reason, the catcher can assume a relatively relaxed position when giving a target.

This position is almost the same as the signal position except that the trunk bends forward, the glove is slightly extended in front; ready to receive the ball, and the throwing hand is hidden behind the ankle, thigh, or glove.



TARGET POSITION-WITH BASE RUNNERS

When giving a target with runners on base, or with two strikes against the batter, the catcher assumes a more upright position, which if necessary allows for a quicker throw or movement to the backstop. The feet are more spread, and the heels are on the ground. The pivot foot is slightly farther back than the stride foot. The body leans well forward, the legs are bent, and the throwing hand is in a fist behind the glove.



To assume this position, have the catcher:

1. Give the signal in the squat position.
2. Stand up straight.
3. Set the feet in throwing position (slightly staggered).
4. Bend the knees as much as necessary to give the target.
5. Extend the glove in front of the body.

WHERE TO STAND

One of the most difficult things for a beginning catcher to determine is where to stand in relation to the batter. There are many advantages in taking a position as close as possible to the batter without, of course, getting hit. These advantages are:

- There is a greater chance of a foul ball going directly into the glove.
- The glove is closer to the pitcher giving an easier target to hit.
- The umpire is closer to the plate, increasing the reliability of the call.
- The catcher is a step or two closer to second base, for a shorter throw.
- Bunts are easier to field.

There are three steps for determining the optimum position in the catcher's box.

First, wait until the batter is in position in the batter's box before crouching. Take note of the batter's swing. Secondly, the catcher should assume a position so that the knees or feet are about one bat length behind the back foot of the batter. Finally, the catcher should keep the glove well out in front of the body, but not reach out for the ball. Allow the ball to come to the glove.

Warn your catcher that if the bat touches the glove or any part of the catcher, the batter is awarded a free base for "catcher's interference".

RECEIVING THE BALL:

The fundamentals for receiving a pitch can be broken down into an eight-step process. The accompanying diagrams will assist to explain this process.

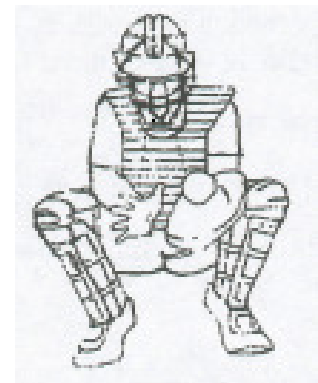
The knees and shoulders should be square to the pitcher - providing good balance and giving the pitcher a good idea of the strike zone. The glove should be used as a target, with the arms remaining outside the knees.



The catcher should attempt to receive the ball in the center of the body. If necessary, move the body after the pitch is released. A catcher should not just reach out for the ball. In order to move quickly, the heels should be on or near the ground and the catcher's weight should be slightly forward. * Note - this stance also aids in making quicker throws.

Stay down low if possible - in order to avoid blocking the view of the umpire. Avoid "popping up" quickly. However, the catcher's first priority is CATCH the ball.

The ball should be received in front of the body - with the arms extended a comfortable distance. The catcher must concentrate on receiving the ball - watch it all the way into the glove. Upon receiving the ball, the catcher should let the arms give or move back to cushion the ball. Once the ball is in the glove the throwing hand should be brought up to cover the ball.



Catchers should work on "pulling the pitch" - moving the glove slightly towards the center of the plate after the ball has been caught. This will help prevent close strikes from being called balls, and may cause some balls to be seen as strikes.

Catchers should also learn to "frame the plate" - catch low pitches with the glove facing up; high pitches on the edge of the plate with the glove facing inward. This technique helps to create more calls in your team's favor.

The best way to master these skills and become a better catcher is through lots of practice. A good training technique is to have the catcher review ALOUD all eight points while catching the ball. Soon, the entire process will become instinctive.

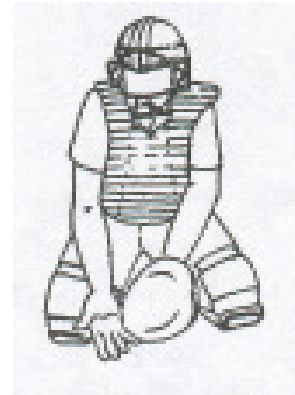


BLOCKING A WILD PITCH:

Catchers have a lot to deal with once behind the plate. Just catching a strike is difficult enough, but balls thrown in the dirt, or in front of the plate are extremely difficult to handle. They can also prove quite costly if they go by the catcher to the backstop with runners on base. It is important that catchers learn the proper technique for keeping wild pitches in front of them.

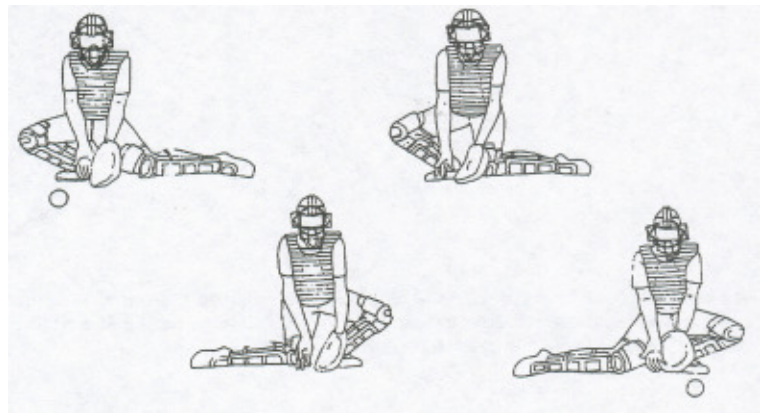
The proper way to block a wild pitch can be viewed as a five-step process:

1. Drop down on both knees - try to keep the body at a right angle to the ball by directly facing it.
2. Bend the upper body slightly forward - the ball should be directed downward as it hits the catcher's chest, not forward and away from the catcher.
3. Use the arms to surround the ball - curl and pull them tight against the side of the body.
4. Place the glove between the knees - the glove should touch the ground, eliminating any possible holes between the legs.
5. Keep both eyes on the ball - concentrate on keeping the head over the ball. Do not turn the head away from a wild pitch.



If a catcher has learned to receive a pitch properly, by moving the body to center the ball, blocking a wild pitch will be naturally easier to do. For wild pitches to the right, the catcher takes a quick shuffle step to the right and gets into the proper blocking position. Naturally, the opposite holds true for a wild pitch to the catcher's left.

Coaching Technique - An excellent drill for catchers to practice blocking wild pitches is to repeatedly bounce tennis or similar balls in front, beside and off the catcher.



This forces the catcher to move to either side from the set position without fear of being injured by a regulation ball. It is a good drill for developing quickness and technique. This drill can be done indoors or outdoors, and with or without full equipment.

Goal Keeper

The purpose of this drill is to develop the proper technique for blocking wild pitches.

Method:

First, mark off a "goal" area on the backstop or fence, one that is roughly equivalent to the catcher's range. Use tape, pylons or just a couple of softballs.

Have the other players pitch the ball from about 15 meters (46 feet) away, trying to either bounce or throw the ball past the catcher and into the taped-off goal area.

Score two points for a ball that doesn't bounce, one point for a bouncer.

Allow 10 throws per person or play to 15. Have the players take turns as the catcher.

THROWING THE BALL:

All good catchers must have a strong, accurate throwing arm. However, this is not always enough. A catcher's throw must also be QUICK! By quickness we mean two things:

- The speed of the throw
- The time required to make the throw

Not only must it be a fast and hard throw, but also it must be released quickly. The following six-step technique, for use with men on base, will help a catcher to improve the accuracy and quickness of the throw.

- As the ball is received, the body pivots to the throwing side - the shoulders are now in line with the pitcher and the chest is facing out. The weight is shifted to the back (or pivot) foot.
- Move the glove hand back to the throwing position as the throwing hand reaches in to grip the ball. The ball is then brought back to the throwing position just behind the ear before it is released.
- The elbow of the throwing arm should be at shoulder height and pointing away from the body.
- Step toward the target with the foot opposite the throwing arm. The glove hand moves forward and down, serving as a counter lever.
- Use a SNAP THROW - using the arm and a strong wrist action. The catcher should throw to a spot just above the base, and the throw should be as low and as accurate as possible.
- Anticipate a play. With a runner on base, the catcher should intend to throw on every pitch.

Coaching Technique

One useful drill to develop the wrist and arm strength necessary for a snap throw is for the catcher to throw to another player from a kneeling position. Begin at a relatively short distance and increase it gradually. A second effective drill is to have the catcher practice receiving the ball and making the throw to a spot five to 10 meters beyond second base.



Target Race

This drill will work on the catcher's ability to make a quick, accurate throw.

Method:

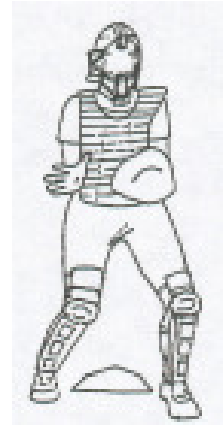
- Have a runner on first base holding a bat, and place a plastic garbage can on second base.
- Have a pitcher pitch the ball. As soon as the ball is released, the runner on first breaks for second.
- The catcher must hit the plastic can with the ball before the runner knocks it over with the bat.

TAGGING A RUNNER

One main hazard for a catcher is a collision with a base runner at home plate. By learning to properly make the tag on a runner at home plate, a catcher can reduce the chances of an unnecessary collision and possible injury.

For the play at home;

- Stand over the right front corner of home plate - with the feet on each side of the plate. This blocks the front-half of the plate, leaving the back part for the runner.
- DO NOT go after the ball - wait for it to arrive at home plate. Always remember to play the ball first. If the ball is going to be wide of the plate, forget about the runner from third and make sure the ball does not go to the backstop.
- After catching the ball, the catcher moves the glove towards the base runner. The bare hand should hold the ball inside the glove. Simultaneously, the catcher should drop the left knee so that the shin guard on that leg is effectively blocking the third base side of the plate. Both arms are extended to tag the runner.
- If it becomes obvious that the runner is going to beat the throw home and score, the catcher should forget about blocking the plate. Instead, the catcher should move to the front of the plate to catch the ball and make any subsequent play on other base runners.



Tagging the Ball

By doing this drill, catchers will improve their ability to apply a tag.

Method:

- While one player throws the ball to the catcher from the outfield, another rolls a ball towards home plate from about 3/4 of the way down the third base line.
- The catcher must receive the ball from the outfield and tag the rolled ball before it goes past.
- The catcher can block the rolling ball, but not until the ball from the outfield has been caught.
- If the rolled ball is already past the catcher, the catcher then throws the other ball to second base.

6.6 COMBINATION DRILLS

6.6.1 Defending Against The Steal

For older players you can combine sliding practice with defensive drills. You need a pitcher, catcher and players at shortstop and 2nd. The rest of the players, with batting helmets on, are at 1st. The pitcher pitches the ball to the catcher and a runner is stealing on every pitch. The short stop takes the throw by the catcher and 2nd base covers the throw. The catcher has to learn to throw to the bag right away and not wait for the base person to be ready, they have to trust their teammate to be in position to get the throw.

The base runner is trying to take the base and should be looking at the person on the base to determine if they need to slide. If the fielder is looking like they are making a motion to catch the ball then they have to slide. If the throw is off then they should be standing up and looking to take another base.

You can switch and have 2nd take the throw and have short take the backup. Switch your pitchers, catchers, fielders and base runners so that everyone gets a chance at something different in the drill. To make it tougher on the base runners have the drill switch to 3rd. 3rd base takes the throw with the short stop backing it up.

Here is a drill to defend against the steal at home. You need a pitcher, catcher and runners, with helmets on, at 3rd base. The pitcher should be just ahead of the pitching rubber, as if they had just released a pitch. The catcher is at the plate in their normal crouching position. The first runner should be 6-8 feet off of 3rd as if they had just taken their lead off. Now put a ball against the backstop, as if the catcher had missed and it rolled there. When everyone is ready, yell GO! The runner should be taking off for home, the pitcher is coming to the plate. The catcher is going after the ball and will toss it to the pitcher who will attempt to tag the runner.

The catcher should be retrieving the ball quickly and tossing it to home plate, where the pitcher should be ready to receive it. The catcher should be tossing the ball as they turn and not waiting for the pitcher to get in position. The pitcher should be careful where they set their feet, on either side of home and not in front, to protect themselves from being spiked by the sliding base runner. When the catcher and pitcher are well coordinated it will be difficult for the runner to score.

Switch pitchers, catchers and base runners to give everyone a chance. Move the ball around to different positions in the backstop for some variety.

6.6.2 Rundown Drills And Tips

In general you should only teach a rundown drill to older divisions, as wild throws with younger players will cost you stolen bases and runs. The safest play is always to throw to the base ahead of the runner and walk them back. Throw the ball to the pitcher on the mound and the play is dead.

If you do teach your team to handle the rundown properly you can have a defensive advantage. You will get many more outs for those unprepared runners and teams will not be as aggressive when facing you.

A team unprepared to deal with rundowns might panic at the sight of a runner caught off base. In reality, few situations favor the defense more. Once your team masters how to deal with this situation they'll view rundowns as easy outs.

The keys to successful rundown defense are as follows:

- 1) Conduct the entire rundown far away from the lead base
- 2) Stay out of the runner's path when not in possession of the ball
- 3) Force the runner full speed back to the original (trail) base
- 4) Hold the ball steady, don't pump fake
- 5) Tag as soon as you can, throw only if you must
- 6) Limit to one throw at the right moment.

Apply these six fundamentals to all rundown situations; regardless of which players are involved, or which direction you instruct them to peel off after releasing the ball.

Other rundown tips:

Too often you see a retreating runner start to dance around – and the fielder stops or slows their advance and matches dance steps with the runner, often pump-faking. This "dance" is best left to discos or endzones, not base paths. If the runner has not turned around and fled full speed to the base, the fielder should continue running right at him. A fielder running forward will ALWAYS catch a runner dancing backward. If you go full speed, the runner has two choices: be out, or run away FAST. If the runner dances then charge them. But if she commits, turns, and finally is going full speed back to their original base then they are easy out with a good throw. Remember, if they are standing (or dancing) you are running and if they are running you are throwing.

Before a tag is even attempted, infielders must establish proper coverage of the lead and trail bases. All nine defenders take part. The two most important roles to fill are those of the ball handlers. They position themselves at least 10-15 feet in front of each base in order to herd the runner into the middle of the base path. A third infielder stands adjacent to the lead base. The pitcher and catcher, if not already engaged in the play, provide back up, as do the outfielders. The value of back up cannot be overemphasized.

Start the rundown by getting the ball as quickly as possible in front of the runner – into the hands of the fielder ten feet in front of the lead base. If no one is there to accept a throw, whoever has the ball must run and occupy that position. Guarding the lead base is the first priority.

The next priority is to stay out of the runner's way. Anyone who blocks the progress of a base runner while not in possession of the ball and not in the act of fielding the ball will be called for obstruction.

Some coaches teach their players to throw and run to the inside of the base path. Others prefer that their defense remain to the right side, since most infielders are right-handed. Either way, crisscrossing the base path is asking for trouble. If the runner tries to obscure your fielders' throws or vision, they should move further to the chosen side.

The ball handler sprints toward the runner forcing them to abandon their shuffle steps and retreat at full speed. Speed is crucial because it exposes the runner's inherent vulnerability in rundowns. While sprinting, the infielder holds the ball steady beside their ear ready to tag or release at any instant. The trail base fielder presents their glove as a visible target and is poised to move toward an arrant throw, just in case.

As the runner approaches within 6-8 feet of the receiving fielder, the ball handler will throw to that base. The base runner will consume precious seconds coming to a complete stop and changing direction. During this maneuver, he is an easy mark. A synchronized throw will allow the receiving fielder to administer the tag with only a stride or two toward the runner. After releasing the ball, the fielder peels off either to the inside or the right side. Whichever method you teach, employ it consistently on all throws. The fielder then curls back behind the base and assumes a back up role.

Anytime a rundown begins with the trail base fielder possessing the ball, like after a pick-off attempt, they momentarily stand their ground. You don't want to force the runner toward the lead base and the fielder cannot leave their base until backup arrives. Instead they should wait for lead base fielder to charge in and then throw to them to begin the standard rundown.

Rundown drill

Put your two fielders at one base and another two at a different base, or home plate. Have the rest of your team put on helmets and they become runners. Put one runner on and have them take a long leadoff. Have the fielder at the lead base (the one that the runner is going to) throw the ball to pick off the runner. The two main fielders should be moving toward the runner while the other two are back-ups. Once a fielder makes a throw they should move off of the base line and go back around to become the backup. They practice moving and throwing to get the tag until the runner makes a mistake and gets out, or the fielders mishandle the play and the runner gets successfully back to either base.

During rundown drills in practice rotate your players so that the fielders get to play the part of the runner. Have them draw on this experience the next time they're on defense. From the runner's point of view they can best sense the optimum moment for the fielder to throw the ball to secure the out.

Split your teams up into two groups and have a competition with this drill. Give the fielders ten opportunities to get the runners and see how many outs they can make. Give the running team a point for gaining the lead base. Then have the groups switch positions and see who wins.

7.0 SAMPLE PRACTICE PLANS