

## WHS Coaching Resource – Catching 101

<b>Philosophy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop good mechanics, muscle memory, and prevent injury (today and in future)</li> </ul>
<b>Warm-Up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure athletes have completed dynamic stretching exercises as well as static stretching on arms and shoulders</li> </ul>
<b>Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure catchers are wearing properly fitting equipment (i.e., shin guards cover the top of the foot to the top of the knee, etc.)</li> <li>Catcher specific gloves are recommended for more advanced levels (e.g., U15 and higher)</li> <li>Catchers need to be instructed to be aware of batters swinging bats and baserunners heading towards home plate</li> </ul>

### Stance/Position

<b>Body</b>	Squatted. Catcher’s butt does not rest on heels when waiting for pitch.
<b>Feet</b>	Slightly wider than shoulder width with weight on the balls of the feet (to be able to move quickly). Note: If catcher anticipates that a baserunner might attempt a steal, they can rotate their body slightly by moving their glove foot in front of their throwing arm foot.
<b>Glove Arm</b>	Extended out in front with elbow out to side. Catcher needs to give a good target to pitcher
<b>Throwing Arm</b>	Place hand behind back or down beside heel of throwing arm foot. Key is to keep this hand away from the ball (especially foul tips or pitches in the dirt) and reduce the chance of injury.
<b>Positioning Relative to Batter</b>	Catcher’s glove should be 6-inches behind the batter’s rear foot when catching arm is fully extended. However catchers need to adjust their position for every new batter. Note that catcher’s feet cannot be in front of the rear chalk line of the batter’s box. Catchers are often too far back which causes several issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low pitches hit the ground in front of the catcher leading to passed balls</li> <li>Catcher is farther away from being able to field a bunt</li> <li>Catcher has more time to react to a foul ball (which often leads to the catcher turning and exposing an unprotected area to a foul ball)</li> </ul>

### Basics

<b>Glove Position</b>	Fingers up (similar to catching anywhere on field) unless the ball is below the knees and then the glove should be turned over (fingers point down)
<b>Catching Position</b>	Ball should be caught out in front with a flexed arm. Encourage catchers to keep the glove in place (rather than “absorbing” the pitch) to assist an umpire’s call.
<b>Blocking Position</b>	For any pitch expected to bounce on the ground before the catcher, the catcher’s primary goal is to block the ball and keep it in front of them (blocking is different than fielding a ball). The proper block position entails: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Center the body in the path of the ball</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Down on knees with glove (fingers pointing down) placed between thighs to create a “wall” (i.e., the ball should not be able to fit through any gaps between the glove and thighs). Tip of glove should be in the dirt</li> <li>• Upper body is upright but with a slight curve (chest should be slightly leaning forward) to encourage the ball to bounce down into dirt (rather than bounce off of chest and passed the catcher)</li> <li>• Catcher’s head should be tucked into chest (tilted down)</li> <li>• Throwing arm extended out to side to encourage throwing arm shoulder to help corral wild pitches (it serves no purpose for the throwing hand to be placed behind glove and only increases the chance of injury)</li> </ul> <p>Note – the goal is to “replace feet with knees”, not fall forward onto knees.</p>
<b>Framing the Pitch</b>	<p>Immediately after catching a pitch that may be a borderline strike (or even slightly outside of the zone), the catcher will want to move their glove slightly inwards towards the strike zone. This movement should only be 2-3 inches at most and may encourage additional strike calls from the umpire. For advanced players, this will be a slight turn of the wrist to “frame” a pitch.</p>
<b>Throwing the Ball to Pitcher</b>	<p>Catchers need to ensure they throw the ball firmly and accurately to the pitcher between each pitch. This will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce delayed steals by baserunners (or steals on wild throws)</li> <li>• Reduce negative impacts to pitcher’s rhythm</li> <li>• Reduce pitcher having to waste energy moving unnecessarily to catch and/or retrieve the ball</li> </ul>
<b>Throwing the Ball During an Attempted Steal</b>	<p>If a runner is on 1B or 2B then catcher should ensure they adjust their stance/position behind the plate to easily allow them to make a quick powerful throw to the base. This will often include turning their body slightly so that their catching foot is ahead of their throwing foot (up to a 45 degree angle). Once the Catcher catches the ball, their goal should be to rise up and take two steps (e.g., a right-handed thrower will do “right-left” and then throw)</p>
<b>Pop-Ups</b>	<p>When a pop-up occurs, the catcher should immediately remove their mask to improve their field of vision. Keep holding onto the mask until the pop-up is located and once located, they can then throw their mask away from the area of play.</p> <p>Note – often players will immediately throw off their mask before locating the ball but they will have then creating a tripping hazard for themselves.</p>
<b>Fielding Bunts</b>	<p>When a bunt occurs, immediately charge out. The catcher and the charging infielders will have to communicate who is best positioned to field the ball.</p>
<b>Plays to Home Plate</b>	<p>To avoid potential collisions with baserunners from third base (as well as avoid potential interference calls that the catcher illegally blocked the plate), catcher should crouch in an athletic position in front of home plate (both feet on pitcher’s side of home plate). The catcher’s glove should be providing a target between knee and waist height. If a ball is thrown accurately from the field to the catcher, catcher should not reach for the ball but instead let the ball come to them, and after catching it then immediately apply the tag (assume the runner is sliding).</p>

<b>Retrieving a Passed Ball</b>	If a wild pitch occurs where the catcher was unable to block it, they need to immediately scramble to the backstop to retrieve the ball. They should ensure they always approach the ball on the correct side to easily bare hand it (i.e., a right-handed catcher will approach on the right side of the ball so that their bare hand is closest to the fence and they can immediately bare hand the ball and throw it to their pitcher at home plate). Catcher can practice throwing both underhanded and overhanded to see which works better for them. The catcher's target will be between knee and waist height at home plate.
<b>Runners on 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup></b>	At advanced levels, the team will either want to have a pre-set decision (i.e., ignore the runner on 1B) or the catcher will be responsible for calling the play out prior to the next batter (i.e., throw hard to pitcher or fake throw to 2B, etc)
<b>Calling Pitches</b>	At advanced levels, the catchers will call the pitches. For this to happen, catchers need to work with pitchers and coaches to determine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signals – e.g., 1 finger is strike, 2 fingers is change-up, etc.</li> <li>• Situational Awareness – what pitch and location is ideal in specific situations (e.g., clean-up hitter up to bat, runners in scoring position, etc)</li> <li>• Count Awareness – what pitch and location is ideal for certain counts (e.g., 0-2 versus 3-0)</li> </ul>

#### Drills

<b>Tennis Ball Catch</b>	With catcher in squat position (with no glove), coach underhand tosses a tennis ball towards catcher's head and chest area. Catcher practices catching with their fingers pointed up.
<b>Tennis Ball Blocking</b>	With catcher in squat position, coach tosses tennis ball (or whiffle ball) into the ground in front of catcher and catcher has to get into their blocking position. Catcher's goal is to have the ball stay in front of them (ideally it would be just behind where home plate is).
<b>Passed Balls</b>	Coach places a ball behind catcher at the backstop. With catcher in squat position (in full gear), coach yells "go" and the catcher has to scramble back to fence, bare hand the ball, and quickly throw it to coach standing at home plate. Variation – coach throws the ball past the catcher who then must find the ball before bare handing it and tossing it to home plate. Key – ensure catcher bare hands the ball and always approaches the ball on the correct side.
<b>Field Bunt</b>	Coach places a ball in front of home plate. With catcher in squat position (in full gear), coach yells "go" and the catcher has to field the ball and make the play to first base. If ball is stationary then catcher should barehand it.
<b>Throwing to Bases</b>	With catcher in squat position (in full gear) and ball in their glove, coach yells "go" and catcher has to make a throw to 2B or 3B. Variation – coach throws the ball to catcher who then makes the throw Key – ensure catcher only takes two steps to make the throw
<b>Blocking Progression</b>	With catcher in full gear, coach can yell "down" and catcher must go into full blocking position. Catcher reviews block position and makes any required

	<p>corrections. Catcher then goes back into squat position and drill repeats. Can do 5-10 repetitions to develop muscle memory.</p> <p>Variation 1 – coach stands 10 feet back with a ball and then rolls the ball towards the catcher. Catcher has to react by going into blocking position.</p> <p>Variation 2 – coach stands 10-20 feet back with a ball and pitches the ball into the dirt in front of the catcher with the objective of bouncing the ball into the chest of the catcher. Catcher’s goal is to try to get the ball to stay in front of them (and ideally end up sitting just behind home plate).</p>
<b>Pop Time</b>	Record the time from when the ball hits the catcher’s glove to the time the ball reaches the glove of the fielder at 2B. Can be used to motivate players (encourage them to go faster and faster) as well as to monitor progression over the season.
<b>Pop-Up</b>	<p>Catcher starts in their squat position. Catcher pops up into throwing position. Coach can correct position. Then go back into squat position and repeat.</p> <p>Variation – place a rope ladder on ground. Catcher starts at one end and pops up into their throwing position. Repeat down the ladder.</p>
<b>Framing Drill 1 – Bat Drill</b>	<p>Framing without the ball (bat drill) – general technique of using the entire body to frame a pitch, not just the glove.</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RpiFwkWslfo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RpiFwkWslfo</a> (see 1:00 to 2:30 for description)</p>
<b>Framing Drill 2 – Soft Hands</b>	<p>Using baseballs (or tennis balls, etc – something smaller than a softball), frame a ball tossed to the catcher.</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RpiFwkWslfo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RpiFwkWslfo</a> (same video as above, see 2:15 – 3:30)</p>
<b>Slide Drills</b>	<p>Work on sliding left &amp; right to get the catcher blocking pitches on either side of the plate. Do ~10 repetitions to each side.</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6acW2KkhiY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6acW2KkhiY</a></p> <p>Key – angle body so that ball will bounce back towards home plate</p> <p>Variation – with catchers in their stance, coach randomly points left or right and catcher has to slide to that side into a blocking position.</p>
<b>Footwork for Throwing to 2B</b>	<p>Walk players through proper footwork for throws to 2B</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 0:00 to 1:00 shows proper technique to 2B</li> <li>• 2:15 to 3:00 shows the “walking footwork drill” – do 10 reps (toe to heal, step behind, step forward)</li> <li>• 3:10 to 3:30 shows the “jump/hop” footwork – do 10 reps</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmlsQPv4OGs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmlsQPv4OGs</a></p> <p>Next, walk players through making this move from their crouch. Right foot moves into left heel as the player starts to stand up. Footwork should be finished as they come up and are standing full.</p>
<b>Blocking Circle</b>	Place balls in a large semi-circle / half circle. Catcher starts at one end and “blocks around the circle” – sliding to and block the ball on their right,

	popping back up to their stance, sliding and blocking to the ball on their right, etc. Once everyone is finished, do the same to the left.
<b>Blocking Line (Lateral Drill)</b>	Place 5-7 balls (or cones) in a line, 2 feet apart. Catcher starts at first ball, goes down in block (does not touch ball), gets up and positions behind second ball. Catcher repeats block at each ball. Work down the line (to the right) and then back (to the left).  Variation – catcher slides to the next ball/cone into a block then gets back into squat. Repeat sliding into a block at each ball/cone.
<b>3 Ball Blocking</b>	Place 3 balls behind the plate (one directly behind, one to the left, and one to the right). Catcher practices blocking each ball. Ensure the outside pitches are blocked so that catcher is angled slightly inwards towards plate.