

Catcher's Drills

As coaches we all know the value of a catcher who can block loose balls and block well. It prevents runners from easily advancing to the next base; it preserves the double play or a simple force out and prevents an easy pass for runners on third base. Also a pitcher with two strikes is able to throw off-speed pitches with confidence knowing nothing will get past the catcher. They can go ahead and throw that pitch nice and low.

The initial stage of blocking practice can be done anywhere off to the side. Someone on one knee in front of the catcher throws skipped balls for the catcher to work on technique. This can be done with tennis balls, incrediballs then moving up to baseballs.

Things to look for in this drill:

- No gap between legs
- The bare hand behind the catcher's mitt, thumbs pointing outwards (this keeps the wrist bones also pointing outward and away from contact with the hard baseball)
- Toes point outward to allow a lower centre of gravity and less gaps to fill
- Chin is down and torso slightly curved over to control the blocked ball (with the torso too straight you may block the ball but it could bounce anywhere – a good block controls the ball just in front of the catcher).



The next stage of this drill is to take it out to home plate. The thrower now moves back further and stands; the catcher takes up his position in the catcher's box in his secondary stance (two strikes or runner on base). Throw skipped balls and have the catcher work at blocking. This is a good drill as a skipped ball off the grass and a skipped ball off the home plate dirt will behave differently both as it skips and after it's blocked.



Now normally this is where blocking practice finishes but what I like to do is keep going. During a game with this exact situation the catcher has to jump up to retrieve his blocked ball to stop an advancing runner so it makes sense to practice the blocked ball retrieval and throw to a base.

- The catcher will block the ball, jump to his feet and throw to first base in an attempt to throw out a runner who has gotten too far off on the pitch in the dirt.
- The catcher will block the ball, jump to his feet and throw to second base to throw out a runner advancing from first on the block or coming back to base on the blocked pitch.
- The catcher will block the ball, jump to his feet and throw to third base, to throw out the runner advancing from second base or the runner who has gotten off too far from third base on the block.

The thing I look for here is for the catcher to first block the ball and to know exactly where it is, then check visually to see what the runner is doing. Jumping to their feet while aligning themselves and their feet to that particular base, picking up the ball with bare hand and catchers mitt and keeping the head over the ball.





This is the drill that just keeps giving! You can now make this a base running drill as well. Put base runners on each base and have them take a lead on the pitched ball and practice reacting to the ball in the dirt. The base runners will assume they are the only one on base so they have total control over whether they advance on the pitch or not. The runner on first base will decide to advance on the blocked ball and will move on to second base or hold the lead and stay on first. The runner on second base will do the same in an attempt to move on to third or hold second base, and the runner on third will also practice decision making on the blocked ball.

For this drill nominate a runner to the catcher before the blocked ball so he can play out one runner at a time. If you have more than one catcher this is a great drill to cycle them through for rapid fire throws. It's a good drill for the infielders as well because they have to practice reading the play and then covering their bag. The runners can move around the bases to spend time practicing decision-making at each base.

- The catcher's throw to first base should be belt high and on the inside corner of the base.
- The catcher's throw to second base, catching a runner advancing from first base, should be belt high on the second base corner of second base.
- If throwing out a runner already on second base the throw should be belt high on the shortstop edge of second base.
- The catcher's throw to third base on an advancing runner from second base should be belt high on the second base edge of third base.
- Where possible I get my catchers to keep their mask on for this drill, only to be taken off if they can't find or locate the blocked ball.



Footwork Alignment for throw to 1B



Footwork Alignment for throw to 2B



Footwork Alignment for throw to 3B.

Hope this helps developing better catchers.

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