

JOE WILKINS

Catching



Stance Recap



We must create the ability to block out of both the primary (no runners on base) and the secondary (runners on base) stances. We have to put ourselves in a position to be able to get our feet out from under us, allowing gravity to help us get our knees to the ground. The only thing that can slow us down is our feet, but lets not allow that to happen. Get into a stance that allows you to move your feet when necessary. This stance, again, should be balanced with a flexed lower-half and a relaxed upper-half. What this means is your legs should be in a flexed position (strong, but mobile) and the upper-half of your body (chest, shoulders, arms, wrists, hands) should be in a relaxed state to be able to react. Let's think like a hitter for a minute. How should you feel in your stance? It is very similar. Flexed lower – Relaxed Upper. Create a rhythm to stay loose, just like in your batting stance.



Blocking Positions



As we see here, we are working on the ball that is with-in the width of the plate. We are getting our feet out of the way so the knees can get to the ground in a position where the ball will be centered on our chest. When the ball hits our body, we want it to re-direct back down to the ground, so our chest angle forward and over the ball. Notice, our elbows are back so that our arms have the least amount of exposure to the ball. The glove is on the ground and the bare hand is behind the glove. The reason for this position is that it keeps us square to the ball. We want to create a trap for the ball so we roll the shoulders slightly forward. This will also create a gap between the chest and the chest protector so that the ball will deaden on the chest protector when it hits. Notice, the feet are wide in the back and the toes are pointed outward for balance and control. We must follow the flight of the ball all the way to the chest so that we can see the bounce it takes off the dirt. This bounce will tend to be different every time so we have to track the ball. Tracking the ball will also help us find the ball after we block it. Blocking the ball is only half the battle. The other half is to know where the ball kicks off the chest and getting to it quickly so that if the runner tries to advance, we have a better chance of throwing him out. **To the Right:** We have to combat the direction the ball is traveling by creating an angle around the ball. As the picture to the right shows, this angle requires the right side of the body to turn while getting into the blocking position. We want every ball we



block to land as close to the plate as possible so, again, we roll the shoulders forward to create the space between the chest and the chest protector. One of the biggest problems we see when blocking to the right and left is that catchers get their lead leg caught underneath their butt. Make sure your lead leg is getting to that kicked-out position so that you have balance to control the ball off your chest. If the lead leg gets caught underneath, the balance is affected and you will lose control and consistency. **To the Left:** The same applies to the left as it does to the right, oppositely. The left direction seems to be a little more difficult for some reason, but either way, work on you weak side more, just like any weakness in your game.



Recover and Scoop



After we block the ball, we have to get up and get it as quickly as possible so if the runner tries to run, we have a chance to throw him out. There are a couple different ways to get to your feet from the blocking stance. One is by using your hands to post on the ground and working your way up to your feet. This is what most young catchers must do. The other requires you to shift the weight backwards on to your feet, swivel your body weight from left to right - then to the up position, without using your hands. This one requires a lot of practice and athletic ability. If done correctly though, it is much quicker. Either way you do it, it is important to assess the situation on the way to get the ball – not before you start to the ball or after you get there. We have to multi-task here to be quick and efficient. Once you get to the point where you are approaching the ball, we want you to squat down, using your legs, rather than bending at the waist only. We want to see you scoop the ball with two hands and “chest it” to gather yourself, then separate and make a throw if necessary. The biggest mistake we see is a catcher that grabs the ball with one hand, never gathers him-self, makes a throw like he’s never made before, and launches one into centerfield or left-field.

Continue to next pages for Block and Recover drills...

Block and Recover Drills

6 Ball Warm-Up



This is a basic blocking warm-up drill to get your catchers loose, while keep their focus on direction and body control. We set 6 baseballs in a pattern like you see in the picture. This pattern can be set up with any combination of directions, as long as there is a change of direction. We focus on gaining a little ground with each block and focusing on body position and control. 3 times through the sequence should give you the warm-up you need to move on to your next drill.

Stick Drill



The stick drill is another basic warm-up drill that forces the catcher to react to a moving object. We will block to all three positions (middle, right and left). We will start out, telling the catcher the pattern – then we will create a random pattern. It basically trains the brain to begin to see a moving object and interpret which direction to go to get to his blocking stance. You can also use your finger and point to the direction, like the next drill.

Pointing Drill



As we said above, we can also use this drill to learn to react to a visual and get to our blocking stance. The coach or partner simply points in a direction for the catcher to block and the catcher gets there as quickly as possible. 2-3 sets of 6-8 reps for either the Stick Drill or the Point Drill are great for quickness and movement.

Already Down



In this drill, we place the catcher in the blocking position to start with. We get about 25 feet away and throw balls in the dirt for him to focus on the upper body only. We want the catcher to get used to seeing the ball all the way to the chest and where it bounces afterwards. We want the catcher to get a feel for adjusting with the upper-body if the ball is going to hit on the left or right side of the chest. This adjustment must come from the shoulders to re-direct the ball back down to the middle. At the same time, we want him

to figure out how to keep the ball off his arms, which hurts and can affect the catcher, mentally. For younger catchers, tennis balls can be used to eliminate the fear of getting hit by a baseball. We use a small glove in this drill so that our catchers aren't tempted to catch the ball in the dirt. Catching the ball in the dirt creates bad habits and is very inconsistent.

Wall Drill



For the wall drill, find any wall that you aren't going to ruin by throwing balls against. The coach or partner is behind the catcher and throws the ball so it hits the wall and bounces once on the ground before the catcher has to block it. It takes a while, but the catcher starts to figure out what to look for to get a good read and focuses more and more. This drill helps with quickness and agility because of the limited reaction time.

Isolation



The isolation drill is when the coach or partner tells the player which direction he is trying to throw the ball. We will throw 4-5 to the middle, then the next catcher goes. When everyone has gone, the first catcher will get 4-5 to the left. Everyone goes through this one and then we will do 4-5 to the right. We usually start slow and increase speed with reps. *Don't forget that we catchers like to compete so create competitions out of these drills.

Exaggerated Angles



We will exaggerate the angles when blocking to isolate the right and left. The catcher knows which way he is going to turn when the ball is thrown in this drill. The only question is how much distance he has to cover to get to the ball. Try to exaggerate the distance you make the catcher travel. Make him work in this drill. If the catcher blocks every ball perfectly, the partner didn't make it difficult enough on them. We usually keep these reps around 5-6 for 2-3 sets each way.

Random



Random Blocking is simply the catcher knowing the ball is going to be in the dirt, but not knowing which direction. The coach or partner will mix it up and come up with different combinations each time. We usually keep these sets at 4-6 for 3 sets and we let the catcher have time in between reps to get set in his stance.

Rapid Fire



In the rapid fire drill, we have 4 baseballs and try to speed the catcher up past his comfort zone. Once the first ball is blocked the catcher must get back up to his stance as quickly as possible because the next ball will be on its way. If the catcher is able to block every one without trouble, we are not working him hard enough. Make your catchers work!

Block, Recover and Scoop



This is where we put it all together. The coach or partner throws the ball anywhere in the blocking range and the catcher must block the ball, get to his feet, get to the ball and scoop it. The catcher finishes this drill in the throwing stance. Or, you can even incorporate throwing the ball to the bases with another player at that base. Make it a team drill and have your base runners get reads in the dirt while your catchers

work on completing this play.



Reaction



For the reaction drill, the coach or partner does not tell the catcher if he is throwing the ball in the dirt or throwing a strike. This is the most game like drill we have for blocking. The catcher should “think middle, react left and right.” If the catcher thinks block, he is already beat on the strike. So think catch, react to block. That is why the drill is called Reaction!



Machine Block



Using a Machine to block is very effective, especially for curve balls and sliders. Don't move the machine for changing location – let the catcher move his starting position to change location. Mix up speeds and pitches by tweaking the machine.

Passed Balls and Wild Pitches



Although we don't want to let the ball get by us, sometimes it happens. And sometimes it happens when there is a runner on third base. So how do we handle this? First, we find the ball quickly, while peeling the mask off and tossing it aside. Then we sprint to the ball, slide into it, scoop it and throw from one knee to the pitcher, who should be covering the plate.

