

JOE WILKINS

Catching



The Target / Pre-Pitch

The target is one of the most crucial aspects to receiving. To receive the ball well, we have to think about what our hand, wrist and forearm are doing before the pitch. We want to start by giving a nice open-glove target to the pitcher. We want to get him locked in. But when he starts his motion, we want to relax our hand and wrist so that we can adjust to the pitch. This relaxing of the hand and wrist should cause the glove to slightly drop or turn (quarter-turn).

Lower-Middle



The pitch that is down in the zone has to be caught out in front of the body for a couple of reasons. We want the umpire to be able to see the pitch from his position and we also want to be able to catch and hold the ball. If we catch the ball more towards our body, the ball will have a tendency to continue its path and force the glove down more than we want. So the ball, in this case, looks lower to the umpire. As we get older and pitchers are throwing harder, with more break on their off-speed pitches, the umpire's job

becomes much more difficult. Our job is to make it easier on the umpire and make the pitcher look better.

Lower-Right



This pitch is down in the zone and to the right of where we originally set up in our stance. To make it look more like a strike, we want to make a slight sway with our weight in that direction. We want to remember to beat the ball to the spot – don't continue swaying after the ball is caught. This will make the ball appear more outside than it really is. Track the flight of the ball and anticipate the end location. We want the front of the glove to be further from us than the heel of the glove (extend the wrist slightly). Stay

away from snapping the wrist too much when catching this ball. Keep your balance, using your right leg to hold your weight from collapsing. Try not to cave the left leg inward during this sway (stay balanced).

Lower-Left



This is perhaps, the toughest pitch to catch, but the most important if you ask your thumb. We have to get from our relaxed, pre-pitch position and rotate our glove upward. We still want to catch the outside of the ball so the web of the glove is facing upward and the heel is obviously underneath the ball. If we catch the ball with the same glove angle as the previous two locations, we risk thumb injury and we can't present the ball as well to the umpire.

Upper-Middle



Because the height of the ball decreases as it travels, we must catch the high pitch deeper in the zone. We need to let it travel to appear as low as possible to the umpire. Here, the elbow must bend as you catch the ball to allow the ball to get deep in the zone and appear lower. This is especially important on off-speed pitches because they tend to have a steeper slope.

Upper-Right



Just as we talked about with the Upper-Middle pitch, this pitch must be caught deep in the zone. There is a slight sway, just as we talked about in the Lower-Right pitch. The only difference is we don't hold the ball as long in one spot like the Lower pitches. We need to catch the ball deep and gradually move the glove to our throwing hand, transfer and throw it back to the pitcher. It is kind of like a mind game with the umpire.

Upper-Left



All the same applies to the Upper-Left pitch as the previous two, except the glove angle and the direction of the sway. Just like the Lower-Left pitch, the glove turns upward to catch the outside of the ball. Again, we catch the ball deep and gradually move it to the throwing hand, as not to alarm the umpire that there was any question whether it was a strike or not. This movement should be one of assumption that it was a strike.

Continue to next pages for Receiving Drills...

Receiving Drills

Around the Zone



Here, the coach or teammate has a ball and moves it around the strike zone for the catcher to check his hand positioning on each pitch location. If there is a correction to be made, we stop, make the correction, and continue.



Shadow



In this drill, the catcher gets with a partner, a coach or even a mirror. If you have a partner, one catcher has to be the leader and one is the follower. Sway back and forth, checking your balance and positioning for all locations. The follower mirrors the leader, moving slow to check all balance points. Pretend you are catching the ball by closing the hand. Make sure your eyes are following the hand to each location. (Also good for conditioning legs)

Tennis Ball Under-hand Toss



The Tennis Ball Under-hand toss is great for a couple of reasons. It promotes soft hands because the ball is light and takes some coordination to catch. It also promotes a good stance, if done correctly. The key is to be able to toss the ball, passing the outside of the knee with the throwing hand. This will cause you to make sure your knees aren't too wide in your stance. If your knees are too wide here, you will either have to throw the ball around the knee (very wide) or you will have to throw in from the inside. Sometimes, I will catch our guys cheating and throwing it with their glove-hand. There are some good lessons to be learned by doing these drills 100% correct.



Catch and Hold



This drill is fairly simple. The coach (or a partner) throws the ball to different locations and the catcher basically catches the ball and holds it, as if he were presenting it to the umpire. Now, we've talked about the high pitch – don't "hold" that one. Your goal is to be the best receiver on the team, in the league, in the area, in the state! Make every drill, every pitch count...be the best drill-guy out there...it's the only way to become the best!

Mix it Up: Mix in curve balls and change-ups so you can work on receiving these pitches the right way too. Gradually, make it harder on your partner - make him work!

From Angles



With the coach or partner down the base-line, the catcher is squared up toward the pitcher's mound. The only thing facing the coach (thrower) is the head/eyes. When the thrower is down the third-base line, we are working on the pitch to the catcher's right. When the thrower is down the first-base line, the catcher is working on the pitch to his left.



Chair Drill



The chair drill is used to make the low pitch tougher to catch. It is a different look that can also be used instead of actually throwing curve balls. We mix this in to keep it fun for our guys – to give a different look to receiving. You can use anything that gets you off the ground – preferably something sturdy. Please, no law-suits!

Getting Closer



The coach starts back around 45 ft. and moves closer with each throw to make it tougher on the catcher. Coach has 4-6 baseballs and the catcher works on staying relaxed to be able to react quickly. The idea is, the closer the coach gets (or the harder a pitcher is throwing) the more the catcher has to relax, but focus to be quick.

Rapid Fire



This drill has the same general idea in mind as the *Getting Closer* drill. But here, we are working on our fast-twitch reaction, one after another. The coach (or partner) has 6-8 baseballs and stands about 20 ft. away from the catcher. Once the first ball hits the catcher's glove, the second is thrown, then the third, and so-on. We try to get 3-4 sets in during a receiving workout.

Machine Work



Use a pitching machine as another way to work on receiving. Since it is harder to move the location of the pitch, the catcher sets up in a different location each time. We have our catchers call a pitch, move to a location, receive the ball...then repeat.



