

Highland Catching Foundation

Throwing Footwork Progression:

- To develop proper throwing footwork to increase accuracy and quickness on throws to second base. The drill can be done with or without a ball.
- Getting the feet under the body quickly. Not a big step forward.
- Get squared up with the target and feet in line with 2nd base.
- Transfer of the ball is done at the chest, similar to every other position making the transfer from the glove to the hand.
- Think about getting into an “athletic position”. Balance of body over the feet.
- Compact, quick mechanics.
- Get the feet on the ground, short compact movement. If you have to throw a 1 hopper, that’s fine. Better to teach the right mechanics and let the body grow into the throw than teach slow mechanics so they can make the longer throw at 13-14 and then have to relearn as they get stronger.

Cross Drill (or T Drill):

- Draw a large inverted cross (or T) on the ground or if you are indoor on the rug.
- Using the proper ready position*, begin with your feet on the line running left to right. This line is square to the pitcher (parallel to the rubber).
- Both feet should be in contact with this line, with your left foot slightly in front of the right. (Right foot slightly behind the line is OK)
- Once the ball is in the glove and transferring to the throwing hand, jab step with the right foot to where the “T” intersects. Use the momentum from the jab step to generate the power behind the throw, step with the left foot forward on the line towards 2nd base. Stay balanced and low and make a throw down to 2nd base. Stop in the cocked position and check your foot alignment. Both feet should be on the vertical line.
- Problems to watch for:
 - Standing up tall before the throw.
 - Rushing the throw before the feet are set. Would result in an off balanced throw.
- Younger catchers/basic version
 - No ball. Walk through the footwork slowly to familiarize with the transition.
 - Go through the drill without releasing the ball. Stop when the arm is cocked to throw and check the feet, balance and arm position.

Transfer Drills

- A catcher's ability to efficiently throw to bases begins with the exchange. Not a single throw can be made if the ball never gets into the bare hand, so the first drill progression when it comes to throwing deals with a focus on a clean transfer of the ball into the bare hand.

Procedure: Playing catch

- Receive the ball with a relaxed glove. Turn the glove (so the glove's opening now faces the bare hand). Take the ball out with a four-seam grip using the bare hand. Start to do it in slow motion- CATCH/TURN/TAKE- in three separate and distinct parts. Once comfortable with all three, we can slowly merge them all together, only quickening things up at the very end.
- Problems to watch for
 - Using the glove to flip the ball into the throwing hand vs grabbing it out.
 - Cheating by positioning the body to throw before the ball is received (similar to what a middle infielder would do catching a relay). Make sure the shoulders stay forward to receive like a catcher would have to in the crouch.
- Younger catchers/basic version

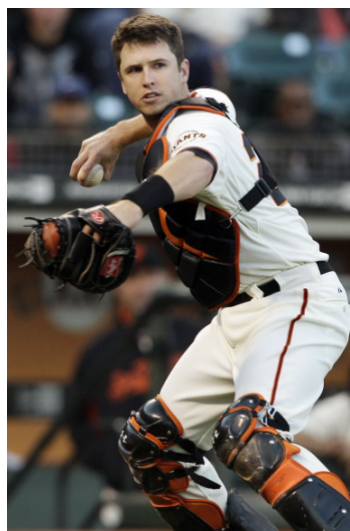
- Play catch on 1 knee, no glove with a tennis ball. Focus on transferring the ball from the glove hand to the throwing hand, without actually catching the ball. Listen for the distinct 2 sounds of the ball hitting the glove hand then the throwing hand. Good drill for indoors/offseason in the basement.
- Progress to playing catch and utilizing the legs and feet.
- Older player/Advanced
 - Practice finding the 4 seam grip quickly, simply through the feel of the ball. Should be the objective during any game of catch. Find the 4 seams before returning the throw.

Procedure: Stepping to meet the ball

- The pivot foot (right foot) does not always move to the same place. If the ball is outside, the right foot should step in that direction to meet it and keep the hands close to the chest (vs. reaching with extended arms).
- Start in the Ready position with the intent to throw a runner out.
 - Coach throws strikes and balls to either side on the plate. The catcher steps to receive the ball close to his body, transfers to the throwing hand and makes a return throw.
 - Doing this on the foul line helps to provide a reference to inside/outside position.
- Problems to watch for:
 - Catcher trying to swing his body toward the inside part of the plate (to a right handed hitter), regardless of the pitch location.
 - Reaching for the outside pitch with long arms, then making an off balanced throw.

Procedure: Arm Position Drill - Advanced

- The transfer should be made around the right shoulder as the body is rotating to line up with 2nd base with the glove BRINGING the ball back to the hand.
- Coach throws 3 balls quickly to the catcher in the ready position.
- The catcher receives the ball, focusing on the throwing hand meeting the glove around the right shoulder.
- 1st 2 throws received are getting into a rhythm and not making a return throw.
- Throw 3 from the coach is received and made down to 2nd base.



Balanced, compact movement with strong arm position to make a quick throw. Keeping body position in an athletic position using legs to make a strong throw.

Blocking Drill Progression

- Blocking works in three distinct parts: first the glove going down to the ground, then followed by the body, and finished back on the feet for the recovery.

Procedure:

- With the glove and knees both already down on the ground, putting the emphasis on the catcher getting comfortable with simply blocking the ball.
 - Glove down in between the knees that are also grounded, start tossing balls in the dirt to perfect the technique of the actual block.
 - Stress the importance of exhaling and rolling the shoulders in as the ball makes contact with the chest protector. Breathing out softens the body, and turns it into a pillow that will absorb the ball, as opposed to a wall (without the breath) that will deflect it. When the ball hits, the chin should tuck down, essentially trying to see the ball hit the chest protector. The objective is to have the balls blocked into a tight group in front of the plate, within reach to grab quickly.
- Problems to watch for:
 - Shoulders back and balls bouncing out of reach.
 - Head turning away from the ball, exposing the neck and potential injury.
 - Body popping up to meeting the ball, bringing the glove off the ground and a hole for the ball to skip through.
 - Straight, locked elbows (like a volleyball player)
- Younger catchers/basic progression
 - Without a ball and practice the sequence, then use soft incrediballs or tennis balls before baseballs.
 - Throwing hand should be placed behind the glove for protection and proper “V” form of the arms and shoulders. Elbows relaxed and bent.
 - Progress to blocking balls thrown to either side. Catchers should focus on using their feet and shin guards to push/glide to get outside the ball and direct it back towards home plate.
 - Once comfortable with the technique, progress to “runners on base” ready position (squat) dropping down/side-to-side blocking.
- Older players/advanced progression
 - Catcher in the “runners on base” Ready position. The objective is to get the body down as quick as possible, block the ball and recover quickly to prohibit the runners from advancing. Coach/other player throws a ball in the dirt in front of the catcher, working side to side as skills improve. Once comfortable getting down to the ground quickly, put it all together with a true game-like block.
 - Next progression would be getting up back on the feet quickly and just pointing to the ball on the ground, which focuses on purely finding the ball.
 - The last key for blocking is the quickness from block to pick-up to throwing position.
 - Focus on footwork to each specific base, like to first on a dropped third strike or to second or third on a dirt ball with the runner trying to advance.



Blocking - fundamentally sound position

Receiving/Ready position

- A good catcher doesn't worry about trying to make a ball called a strike by pulling it into the strike zone. They focus on making sure every strike is presented well and is called a strike.
- They get the calls of the pitches on the black that could go either way.
- Umpires won't give you that call if you're always trying to pull balls back into the strike zone.
- They give a low target; they beat the ball to the spot and catch it in a way that the glove doesn't move when the ball is received.
- If you give a higher target, you'll have to move the glove down to catch a lower strike and catch it going downward vs. beating it to the spot.
- Good balanced stance
 - Feet as wide as the plate (youth) and wider for older levels
 - Allows the catcher to sway/adjust to pitches on the corners (inside/outside) with minimal movement and presentation for the umpire.
 - Allows catchers to use less reach/stab outside of their knees and more catching the ball inside the frame created (space between the shoulders)

Quiet hands, concentration and tracking drill

- Primary stance, relaxed set-up (no runners on base)
- No mask or glove - bare hand receiving
 - Coach tosses tennis balls around the strike zone
 - The catcher focuses on a relaxed glove hand, swaying the body so shoulders are framing zone and receiving the ball, watching it all the way to the glove hand
- Problems to watch for:
 - Stabbing or reaching for the ball - Let the ball travel as far as possible. Think alligator hands.
 - Feet too close together



Quiet hands tracking drill example



Receiving/Ready position example - Primary stance



Receiving/Ready position example - Secondary stance