



Baseball PEI Catcher Training Manual

Gear:

- **Helmet.** There are two types, the “hockey” helmet and the cap-and-mask.
 - **Hockey mask.** Must be snug without movement – on throws in particular – in order not to hinder vision
 - Must come to a point beyond the chin which covers the throat area
 - These are popular, especially with younger players. However, they tend to be a bit heavier than the cap-and-mask, and more difficult to take off head when necessary
 - **Cap-and-mask.** Must be snug without movement – on throws in particular – in order not to hinder vision
 - Each one should have a “turkey-neck”, which is attached to the bottom of the mask that protects the throat from foul tips
 - These are more popular with older players. They may be a little awkward for younger players, but older players find them a bit lighter and easier to take off head when necessary
- **Chest protector.** This is important, as it will absorb the impact of foul balls hitting the catcher’s chest. Like all catcher’s equipment, it must be snug without movement, and all straps and buckles must be functional and undamaged
 - Often it’s necessary to tighten the straps with tape. The chest protector may fit well, but hang off the body due to straps being too long. This is where tape will come into play and make it more safe
 - Most older models have a piece that hangs between the legs, and a piece that extends over the shoulder of the right arm. If a young catcher has one of these, make sure he is comfortable and able to move, and these attachments do not bother him
 - Most new models have pieces that attach to either shoulder via Velcro, and some have a piece that will hang between the legs via Velcro. These can be used so long as the catcher is comfortable and able to move.
- **Cup.** This is crucial, and no catcher should be catching in a game or practice without a cup (for that matter, no player should be playing and practicing without a cup). It must be snug without movement, but not too tight as to cut off circulation.
- **Shin guards.** They must be snug without movement, and fit on the knee and be close to the same length as the shin. No part of the knee/leg should be exposed when bent. Make sure they have foot protection with covers the top part of the foot (without going out far past the top of the foot)
 - Many catchers now wear knee-savers as a part of your shin guards. They can take the pressure off a catcher’s knees when not receiving the pitch. However, make sure they are attached to the lower straps on the shin guards. If they are right up underneath the knee, the catcher cannot get into the proper crouch when receiving the pitch. Make sure they are snug and without movement
- **Catcher’s glove/mitt.** There are many different models and styles. The important thing is that the catcher can handle the weight, and be able to receive the ball properly. As well, guard against one that is too wide (unless you’re dealing with a pitching staff of entirely



knuckleballers, which would be a rarity). Too big of a glove makes the transfer difficult, severely reducing the chance of getting a throw off quickly and getting a runner out.

Coaches' tip/drill: Make sure to keep catcher's gear every so often to make sure it fits correctly and isn't damaged. Also keep some hockey tape or something of that nature in case adjustments have to be made to the straps.

Squat to give signals

- When giving signals, the catcher should be in a squat and is comfortable.
 - Upper legs rest comfortably on the calves, weight on the balls of the feet
- The body should be square to pitcher, and the knees somewhat squared and the glove resting – assuming the catcher is right-handed – to the side of the left knee. This is to prevent runners or coaches on first and third base from seeing and stealing the catcher's signals and making sure his pitcher sees his signals clearly

Coaches' tip/drill: Have your catcher once-and-awhile squat in front of you and give signals. Ask the catcher if he/she is comfortable, and check to make sure you can see his/her signals. Also make sure the legs aren't open enough that somebody at first or third base can see the signals, or the fingers giving the signals are too low.

Basics of Catching – Crouch with no runners on and less than two strikes

- Your hips and shoulders should be square to the pitcher and your feet straight across
- Your weight should be on the insides of your feet, and you must be balanced
 - Balance is key. The catcher should not be falling over, and it should be difficult for someone to push him over
- Get as low as comfortably possible while still being in an athletic position ready to react to anything.
 - The purpose of getting low is to allow the umpire to clearly see and call pitches in the lower half of the zone, plus almost unconsciously beckon the pitcher to throw low in the strike zone
- Set up off the middle of the plate. If you have your glove in the middle of the plate, the pitcher will aim for the middle of the plate, which leads to a short outing. Set up off the corners of the plate
- Your receiving arm should be relaxed - somewhere near the middle of being completely straight and being completely bent toward your chest- and your palm should be pointed at the pitcher. Your forearm should almost be sitting on your left knee
 - Do not set up with your receiving arm straight or have your arm completely bent
- When receiving the ball, you should not let the ball “eat you up.” You should move the glove slightly to meet it. Have a relaxed wrist that firms up as the ball meets your glove
- Your elbow should be below your mitt
- Your throwing hand should be behind your nearest knee (right-handers would have their throwing hand behind their right knee)



- Remember for any pitch, track the ball right into your glove. When you stop tracking the ball, your chances of catching it cleanly (or blocking it if the situation call for that) decreases dramatically
- For any pitch that is low and away from your glove, drop your left knee slightly to allow for a greater range of motion with your receiving arm. This way your knee does not interfere with the movement of your arm and you can more easily frame a pitch down

***Coaches' tip/drill:** First, without a glove, get your catcher into a proper crouch with no runners on, and from 20 ft away, toss the ball underhand to the catcher. Make sure they are tracking the ball right into their left hand and stick the pitch. Make sure you throw to different areas of the strike zone, and occasionally throw one in the dirt, to ensure they aren't cheating. After a few without a glove, then have them put on a glove and repeat.*

To work on reflexes, at the end, toss 5-6 balls quickly. Once they catch the balls, just let them drop.

Basics of Catching – Crouch with runners on and/or two strikes

- In this crouch, you have to able to block balls in the dirt, move quickly and be able to throw quickly
- The squat is slightly raised where the weight is now on the balls of your feet instead of the instep and your butt is slightly raised above the back of your knees
 - Remember to stay low
 - Your feet will now slightly be wider than in crouch with nobody on
- Your feet can be slightly staggered (left foot maybe an inch or two in front of your right foot) and toes angled slightly out to the side, but remember you still have to be square to the pitcher and be able to block balls in the dirt
- Throwing hand should be in a fist (with your thumb tucked into your fist), one – two inches behind the glove
 - Thumb should be tucked into fist to guard against breaking the thumb, and fist should be an inch or two away from the glove to protect against injury and not jar the ball from the glove when it makes contact

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To work on reflexes, at the end, toss 5-6 balls quickly. Once they catch the balls, just let them drop.

Basics of Catching - When to Set Up for a Pitch

- When nobody is on based, once the pitcher starts their windup, it would be a good time to present the glove/target. With runners on base, when the pitcher comes set. If you set up too early, it tips off the batter to location of the pitch



Coaches' tip/drill: When doing the tracking drill above, make sure they don't get into the habit of staying stationary behind home plate. Make sure they set up in different areas.

Basics of Catching – Framing

- Framing is the art of making a pitch that is near (border line strike/ball) the zone appear to be a strike when in fact it may not be.
- It's a subtle movement of the wrist that drags the ball toward the strike zone as you catch the ball. The framing motion is smooth and should not be done in a jerking motion.
- To effectively frame, you should try to catch the outside of the baseball and close the four fingered part of the glove in the direction of the strike zone.
- Do not try to frame an obvious ball. It will not fool the umpire, and will make him less likely to give borderline calls later in the game

Coaches' tip/drill: This drill is a 5 round drill where the coach will throw a pitch from 30 – 50 ft away. The catcher will sway to the pitch if needed, catch the ball, and frame the pitch if necessary. The coach is the umpire and it's up to him to determine if the catcher made the right decision about whether to frame the pitch or not. If the coach determines that the catcher made the wrong decision or used poor technique, the drill stops, all balls are returned to the coach and the drill starts over. First round is 5 pitches with the catcher dropping the ball to the side after catching it and framing it if necessary. The coach should throw the pitches rapidly. This helps the catcher develop a good habit of not framing the pitch for too long. second round is 4 pitches, third round - 3 pitches, etc. The goal for the catcher is to complete the drill without having to start over.

Basics of Catching - Blocking balls

- It's important for a catcher to assume that every pitch will be in the dirt. It's easier to adjust to catching the ball rather than assuming you will have to catch the ball, then have to adjust to block the ball
- Remember you are “blocking” the ball, not catching it in this scenario
- Recognize the pitch and quickly thrust your knees to the ground while remaining square to the pitcher. Clear your feet by moving them back and to the side, with your toes pointed away from your body. Your knees should almost land where your feet were located and be spread apart just past shoulder width.
 - Do not just fall forward to your knees, as this takes too long. You need to get down quickly. Pretend a wire cuts out your shins below your knees. Clear your feet and thrust your knees down.
- Your glove should move from your target position to directly between your legs with your palm up, facing the pitcher and your throwing hand positioned behind the glove. The web of the glove should be against the ground and both arms should be snug with your body
- Tuck both elbows against your body to provide a greater surface area for blocking
- Keeping your shoulders square to the pitcher, round your shoulders and bend at the waist so your upper body is leaning forward over your thighs. You can slightly give with the pitch as it hits your body which helps to control the ball even more.



- This creates an angle that will deflect a ball down in front of you and at a controlled distance
- By leaning forward when blocking the ball, the goal is to “smother” the ball. The only way to effectively smother the ball is to have your upper body leaning forward
- Tuck your chin to your chest so you do not get hit in the throat
- For blocking balls not straight at you – to the side – you must
 - Slightly bend the knee of the opposite direct you must slide
 - In the direction of your angled toe (remember earlier it was said to angle your toes out), you must slide in that direction
 - The goal is to block the ball with your chest – same as when blocking a ball straight on – on an angle so the ball will funnel towards home plate and the middle of the diamond
- After blocking the ball, you must pop up quickly. This will involve just jumping up from your knees to your feet. If you put one knee up and then the other – the traditional way of getting up off your knees – that will take too long

***Coaches’ tip/drill:** Have catcher do “up/downs.” Have catcher in crouch, and say “down”. The catcher will drop down into proper straight-on blocking position. Then say “up,” and the catcher will pop up to their feet properly, using their arms as leverage to pull them up (please note this doesn’t mean arms should ever touch the ground). Do this for 1 – 2 minutes.*

Stand 10 – 15 feet away from catcher, have them in proper crouch, and gently but firmly throw ball so that it hits the ground in front of the plate straight at the catcher. At first, have catcher drop down and block properly. After a few, have them block properly, then pop up and grab the baseball. After a few minutes of this, move 2 – 3 feet to the side and throw ball so it bounces in front of home plate on an angle, forcing the catcher to block the ball to the side. After a few of those, switch to the other side so the catcher has the opportunity to block balls to both sides of the plate.

Basics of Catching – Throwing

- When throwing to a base while catching, your throwing motion is different from a pitcher or fielders. A windup throw will take too long to throw runners out.
- You want to “short-arm” the ball, which means you bring the ball directly back to the area past your ear, and throw through
- You should always grip the ball in a four-seam grip, to prevent the throw from tailing away.
- When throwing to a base, once you catch the ball, you want to present the ball to your throwing hand with your glove. This means you turn the glove towards your hand and bring the ball, via the glove, to your hand. This is quicker than reaching into the glove with your hand to retrieve the ball, then bringing it into a throwing position
- Footwork when normally throwing to a base:
 - As you receive the ball, take a short jab step with your right foot into the middle of your stance, slightly in front of you (close to replacing your left foot)
 - Transfer the ball from the glove to the throwing hand and take the throwing hand back to initiate the throwing motion



- As you stride toward your target with your left foot, be sure to point your lead shoulder to your target as well – your body should be perpendicular to second base
- Keep your elbow up at shoulder height as you throw the ball
- Stay low; don't pop up
- Keep your hand behind the ball, fingers on top of the ball as you release and reach out to your target feeling the ball come off your fingertips
 - Whether the location of the pitch is down the middle, inside or outside, catchers must clear themselves of the hitter. Stay in the middle line of home plate and second base much like a runway. Hitters are entitled to the batter's box and will not be charged with interference if you make contact with them while they are in their box
- When a baserunner is running on a pitch down and away to a right-handed batter (in on a left-handed hitter), it may be necessary to “rock-and-fire” to second or third base:
 - Keep your right foot planted where you caught the ball, transfer your weight to the backside leg, pull your glove and hand to the throwing position, step toward your target (transferring your weight to the front side), and deliver a strong accurate throw.
 - Avoid using this method on pitches to the left side of your body.

***Coaches' tip/drill:** Get anywhere from pitching distance to 30 feet in front of the plate, and throw pitches to the catcher in the correct crouch. First of all, when they catch the ball, have them pop up with correct footwork and simulate a throw (without throwing or the follow-through motion). After some of this, have them do this and actually throw. Make sure they throw to all bases. If possible, have a batter in the batter's box during this to simulate game situations.*

The footwork drill and simulation portions of this drill can easily be done as part of a catcher catching a bullpen.

In order to get used to grabbing the ball consistently with a four-seam grip – which is crucial on throws to bases – have the catcher (and all players throw a ball to the ground, and pick up without looking and come up with the proper grip. After many reps it should become almost automatic to grab the ball with a four-seam grip.

Basics of Catching – Fielding bunts or choppers

- Don't ever assume that there will be a bunt. If you do, and there isn't, then you can be caught in a less than optimal receiving position
- Once the ball is bunted or chopped, and you can get to it before any other player, pop up and run towards the ball (mask on or off is fine) shouting that you have it.
- If down the third base line, go towards the right of the ball (with your back towards first base) and almost run past if it is still moving. Scoop up the ball with both your glove and throwing hand at the same time. Then reset – turn towards first, keep your legs wide, your butt low, plant and make a good throw
- If towards the pitcher or first base line, go towards the baseball in a fashion so when you scoop up the ball with your glove and throwing hand, you back is facing left field. Shuffle your feet, keep your legs wide, your butt low, plant and make a good throw
- Remember, if on the first base side of the diamond and having to make a throw to first base, always make sure you have a clear throwing path to first base that doesn't risk the



runner being hit with the throw. Either shuffle left or right (depending on the situation), plant, and make a good throw.

***Coaches' tip/drill:** Have the catcher in the proper crouch at home bat, and while standing behind them, toss the ball into areas on the infield where a bunt or chopper would go. Have the catcher pop up, run, field and throw the ball to first correctly. As well, have them do this occasionally throwing to second or third base. One variation of this drill is after you toss the ball, between the catcher is about to approach the ball, shout which base the ball should be thrown to, to simulate a game situation. To add more of a game situation feel to it, have a batter in the batter's box, and have them run to first after the ball leaves your hand.*

Basics of Catching – Fielding a pop-up around home plate

- Make sure you are tracking the ball, and see it off the bat
- Immediately stand up, remove your mask, and locate the ball. Make sure to keep the mask in your throwing hand so you do not trip over it.
- Turn your back to the infield. The physics of a popup dictate that the ball will always come back toward the field of play.
- Go to the area of where the ball will land. Stand where it appears like ball will land a few feet in front of you.
 - Read and react to the ball. It is easier to move forward on a ball than to backpedal.
- Once you are set, discard your mask by throwing it hard and to the right. Make sure it is far enough away as to not interfere with the play.
- Using both hands, catch the ball above your head.
- If there are runners on base, quickly turn and find them.

***Coaches' tip/drill:** Either at home plate, or in a spacious area in the outfield, set up a plate and have your catcher crouch behind it. Stand in a batter's box, and throw the ball up in the area. Have the catcher follow the ball from your hand, stand up and field the pop-up. Make sure to vary the height the ball is thrown and the area the ball is being thrown.*

Basics of Catching – Tag play at the Plate

- Position your left heel at the front left corner of the plate. Angle your left foot toward third base and position your other leg towards the area of the throw to accept the throw. Allow the runner the very back portion of the plate. Assume an athletic stance so you are able to react to a throw or bounce.
- Align the cut-off man, moving him left, right, in, out; whatever position he should be in
- Read the throw. If it's a good throw right to you or on a long hop towards you, maintain your position. If it's going to be a short hop, go get the ball. Worst case scenario is waiting for a short hop and the ball gets by you. Never let the ball get by you. Always at least block it
- Once you catch the ball, apply the tag. If you have caught the ball well out in front of home plate due to the short hop, turn, look for the runner, and run and attempt to tag them. If it's a good throw to your set-up position in front of home plate, catch the ball, transfer it to your bare hand and put that hand in the glove, look for the runner and apply the tag (to help avoid the ball being jarred loose). If the runner is attempting a sweep of



hook slide far away from you, you may have to transfer the ball to the glove and do a one-handed sweep tag

***Coaches' tip/drill:** Have an outfielder, a cut off and the catcher at home plate. Roll the ball to the outfielder, and have him come up throwing. Make sure the catcher directs the cut, gets into proper positioning, and catches the ball and applies the proper tag. If you only have two people, have the cut throw to the catcher.*

Do game situational drills that mimic the drill above, except with all the position players. On a wet day, move this to the outfield so home plate is in the grass, and have a runner (this is to ensure the runner is not hurt while sliding)

Basics of Catching – Covering Bases

- You have a responsibility to back up first base on routine grounders hit to the infielders. Your purpose is to keep the hitter from advancing to second on a wild throw to first.
- After the ball is hit, run hard along the fence to back up first. Be aware of the angle the throw is coming from and be ready to react to a wild throw.
- With a runner on first base you still back up first, but be aware that you may have to hustle back to the plate. If there are runners on second or third base, stay at home as there may be a play at the plate.
- If the opposing team is trying to bunt a runner on first to second base and the third baseman fields the bunt, you must cover third base.

***Coaches' tip/drill:** Do game situational drills. After the ball is hit, depending on the situation, ensure the catcher is running, backing up the ball in the correct scenarios.*

Basics of Catching – Throwing to the pitcher covering home plate

- Once the ball gets by you, you will have to peel to the side in which the ball went
- Go to the right of the ball, **slide** to the side of the ball, grab the ball and in one motion, field the ball and throw towards home
- In order to do this effectively and successfully, you must stay low and not pop up while fielding and throwing the ball
- If throwing to any other base, go to the ball, slide to right of the ball, pop up and make a good throw. Due to the nature of the play at the plate, you do not have time to pop up and then make the throw

***Coaches' tip/drill:** Have the pitcher purposely throw past the catcher, and have the catcher run back and simulate a throw back to home plate on a wild pitch. Make sure after your pitcher throws the ball, he covers home plate.*

Basics of Catching – Rundown between third base and home

- Make sure to focus on catching the ball first. Lack of focus may mean a drop or a ball get past you
- Run hard towards the runner – forcing him towards third base - holding the ball at the throwing position to be quicker to throw and let the fielder see the ball
 - Never fake a throw; that may fake the runner, but it will often confuse the fielder which can lead to mistakes



- If you can't catch the runner, make sure your throw is firm and at the chest of the fielder. Make sure you and the fielder are on the same side; don't throw across the runner (usually the left side of the runner if everybody is right-handed)
- Once you make your throw, run to the next base (in this situation, third base) making sure not to make contact with the runner. While a properly executed rundown should be finished in two throws or less, be ready to participate again
- If the throw comes back to you, give the verbal command "now" when you want the ball thrown to you, and take a step forward as the ball is being thrown to you. Then apply the tag run at the runner again

Coaches' tip/drill: Set up a game situation drill with a rundown between home and third base. Ensure the catcher and the position players are following proper form and procedure.

Basics of Catching – Bullpens and pre-game

- When catching a bullpen, use this time effectively to practice. Don't let any ball get by you. Use this as an opportunity to practice blocking pitches in the dirt. Use the time to work on crouches, especially the crouch with runners on base. Use the time to practice footwork on a throw to second. Use this practice for the pitcher as practice for you as a catcher!
- During the pre-game, warmup, throw, and stretch with the team. Then, go briefly examine your equipment to make sure it isn't damaged and in good working order. Afterwards go have the pre-game bullpen with the starting pitcher with all of your gear on (so you are used to it).
- At the conclusion of the pitcher's warmup, you will have a good sense of what the pitcher is throwing that day. Have a discussion with the pitcher as to how he's feeling, what's working, what isn't, and how he plans to go after the lineup. Make sure you have your signals clear with him. Remember to be positive, and try to have the pitcher leave that discussion feeling confident about the game.
- Upon the completion of this, you should find time for a coach or other player to run a tracking and blocking drill for you for about 5 minutes. Work on tracking the ball into your hand, blocking balls straight on and to the side. Also, at some point before the game, have a coach throw a few balls up into the air and have you practice catching pop-ups.
- If possible (due to time constraints and when the pitcher wants his warmup), you should catch for the coach at home plate during the pre-game infield/outfield in order to get a sense of how your fielders are playing today, their throws, etc. During this would be a good time to practicing catching a few pop-ups. At the completion of the infield/outfield, you should make a couple of throws to second to simulate throwing on a steal play
- At some point, you should check the fence around the backstop for any holes, or check for any other hazards or factors. As well, you should roll a few balls down first and third base line to get a sense of how bunts and choppers will roll at that particular field during that game

Coaches' tip/drill: Have catchers catch your pitchers' bullpens. Make sure they aren't lazy and use this opportunity to work on proper receiving, framing, and footwork to throw. Make sure they are doing the same thing during the pre-game



warmup, and talk to them often about what you expect and what they should work on, and how for them to interact and speak to the pitcher

Basics of Catching – Mental game

- As the catcher, you must be the smartest, most alert player on the field. First of all, you have to be constantly reading your pitcher. For example, if a pitch isn't working, you may not want to use it in a key count, while if another pitch is working, you may want to use that in a key count. If the pitcher seems frustrated, go out and attempt to calm him down. Make sure you keep everything with your pitcher positive
- You must be reading hitters, and notice their strengths and weaknesses
- You must also paying attention to baserunners, and position of the players on your field
- You must not let difficulty at the plate carry over into your catching, and vice versa
- You must maintain a good relationship with the umpire. Never shout or show up an umpire (for example, after a borderline ball, never turn and look at the umpire). Make sure your conversations with the umpire are positive and friendly. If you have questions about a certain pitch, ask it the next inning, but make sure to do it in a way that is positive and friendly. If you maintain a good relationship with the umpire, that may help later in the game
- As challenging as the physical aspect of catching is, the mental aspect may be ever more so!

***Coaches' tip/drill:** Talk to your catcher often! Quiz them on certain situations, ask for their opinions on certain things. Make sure they are always thinking, and don't have a chance to be lazy.*

Talk to your catcher about what you want to do with certain batters. For example, you almost always want to get ahead 0-2. When your pitcher gets to 0-2, what do you want him to throw? Do you want a fast ball strike because he could not hit the 2 previous fast balls? Do you want a hittable pitch? Do you have the luxury to throw a "waste" pitch or could this throw off the pitcher and get him out of his groove? Whatever he throws, make sure it's not hit. Nothing is more deflating than a 0-2 pitch becoming a base hit. These are the type of things you should discuss with your catcher.

Contact

- If you ever have a question about catching, feel free to contact Randy (baseball@sportpei.pe.ca) or Connor (connormyers_9@hotmail.com).

Best of luck this upcoming summer!