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ENGL 1013

Date

The Fundamentals of Catching in Baseball

Catching is one of the most difficult positions to play in sports. It requires a great deal of thought, physical stress on the body, and coordination. Many people think that a catcher just catches the ball and throws it back to the pitcher. However, this is a terrible misconception! A catcher plays a much greater role beyond what most people are aware of. As a catcher, you have the responsibility of the secret service. You are responsible for taking the bullet, or the baseball, to protect the president, or the umpire. The catcher is also responsible for making quick decisions that determine the outcome of the entire game and must sacrifice his body on every play. It takes a very dedicated and mentally and physically strong individual to catch.

In order to catch, you have to know certain gestures that indicate what is to be done. The most common signs done by a catcher are the signs that are given to the pitcher to indicate what pitch is to be thrown. Most often the coach, catcher, and pitcher come up with these signs so there will be no confusion about what should be done. Usually the coach relays a message to the catcher through gestures; then the catcher in turn gives signs to the pitcher on what the coach wants pitched. In order to confuse the opponents on base, catchers and pitchers often develop combinations in which there will be a sequence given with a certain point in it which indicates what pitch is to be thrown. This is done to deter the other team from stealing signs that could possibly help them. Some catchers watch the other team's coach sometimes and pick up on their signs that indicate what they are going to do. The job of the catcher is to then relay designated

signs to teammates so they will be aware of what is about to happen.

Not only does a catcher have to memorize many confusing signs, but a catcher also has to know what to do in every situation. The catcher can see the entire field, so he should stay alert and keep teammates informed about what is going on. A catcher should also be able to visualize the circumstances that will result from certain actions taken by his command. A catcher has to know where the ball should be thrown in certain bunt-coverage situations and where the play should be when the ball is hit to different fielders. The catcher must make a quick decision and yell to inform the fielder where he should throw the ball. When the catcher fields a bunt, he informs the fielder where the throw is going to be so the runner will not get hit by the ball and so the action goes smoothly. If the ball is hit into the outfield and there are two runners on base, one coming home and one advancing to the next base, the catcher has to make the quick decision of deciding which base to throw to and which throw will do more good. If the throw is to come home, the catcher has to line either the first baseman or the third baseman up in a line with the outfielder so the outfielder can make an effective throw home and possibly get the runner out. If the catcher makes the decision that the ball should be thrown to another base, he should inform the outfielder or the person with the ball where to throw it by yelling, "cut three," for instance. This means the person should cut the throw and throw it to third base rather than bringing it home or throwing it to another base. When there are runners on base, a catcher has to know where to throw the ball, keeping in mind the number of outs and what the possible consequences could be. The catcher is taught where to throw the ball when runners are on certain bases with a certain number of outs. One wrong decision about a throw could allow a run to score and change the complete outcome of the game

Catching is not only very hard on the mind, but it is also very grueling on the body. In

order to catch, you must be in great shape. Catchers need to have a fairly large, muscular frame because they take a beating every time they play the game. They are constantly hit in the chest, facemask, and arms by balls ricocheting off the hitter's bat or by balls bouncing in the dirt. Catchers have to be able to endure the pain and continue to play their role. Most catchers should have very strong wrists because they are constantly catching the ball and holding up a heavy mitt. They should also have a very strong throwing arm because they have to throw the ball more than anyone on the field. Catchers have to endure grueling heat because of all of the protective gear they have to wear. They have to wear a facemask; a hot, thin foam chest protector; and thin foam-lined plastic shin guards. Although the gear is very hot and tends to become a nuisance, it is very beneficial in that it reduces the pain of getting hit. Perhaps the hardest thing for a catcher to do is squat day after day for hours at a time. Catchers must have strong legs in order to support their weight for long periods of time, or they will collapse. A person with weak ankles, knees, or thighs or a person with shin splints can hardly stand to catch because of all of the stress that is exerted on these body regions. Getting prepared to block home plate is one of the hardest things to do. You have someone coming at you full force, trying to plow you over, so you have to get planted and get ready to lay your shoulder into him as he tries to lay his body into you. Since the catcher has equipment on, the pain will not be as bad for him as for the runner, but it adds to the pain received throughout the game. A catcher has to stand his ground no matter how intense the pain is because home plate is his territory, and no one is supposed to step on it. Catchers are taught from day one to sacrifice their bodies for balls bouncing in the dirt. A passed ball could result in a run or a loss, so catchers must do everything they can to block the ball. As a catcher, you are taught to shift your weight, drop to your knees, shrug your shoulders forward, and make a fork to block the ball. This position always results in

your getting hit in the arms or wrists, but at least you keep that run from scoring. A catcher is also supposed to back the throw up to first base when a ball is hit to the infield. A catcher has to get up from the squatting position and run as hard as he can down the baseline with all of that equipment on to make sure nothing happens if the ball is overthrown or missed. This is very strenuous on the knees because you are going from one extreme in squatting to another in running almost instantaneously. Perhaps this is why catchers have such short careers.

Coordination plays a major role in the job of catching. In order to catch, you have to be able to follow the ball all of the way into your mitt. You must be aware of the movement that is associated with certain pitches so you will know the direction in which they are traveling. If you ever get crossed up with your pitcher on signs, coordination comes in handy. You may be set up for a different pitch than what the pitcher is going to throw, so you have to rely on your quick wits to catch the ball or at least make a certain movement that will allow you to keep the ball in front of you. If a catcher were uncoordinated, it would be a terrible sight because he would more than likely get hit by the ball on every pitch. Squatting and trying to catch the ball is completely different from standing and playing catch. A catcher also has to be very coordinated in order to keep his balance while he is squatting. A clumsy catcher would trip over his own feet every time he got up to run or would simply tip over while squatting. It is absolutely necessary for a catcher to quickly get up and spot the ball without being dizzy so he can inform the fielders on where it is. Without the catcher being able to focus so quickly, many fly balls would be dropped, and he would be out of a position

As you can see, there is much more to catching than what people observe. People think that catching is just another position in the field that can be filled by just anybody. If people think catching is easy, I would like to see some of them get out there and catch a few innings and

then see what they think after getting hit by the ball several times and having to squat the entire time. Catching is not an easy position to fill, and it takes a very mentally and physically strong, coordinated individual to do the job.