

THROWING & CATCHING

THROWING & CATCHING IS THE NAME OF THE GAME. If you can't do it well, you can't play hardball. It is not a coincidence that the best players we see on our level are the ones with the best throwing and catching skills. **NOW** is the time to develop these skills. If a player hasn't developed proper throwing mechanics and catching skills by the time they're finished with Little League (age 11-12), chances are remote they ever will.

There is no secret formula! It is repetition of proper form...and practice, practice, practice. It will cost you NO money, requires NO fancy equipment and all you need to do is put in the time and effort to "play catch."

Unfortunately, all too often practice becomes an arduous time-consuming task; viewed by the kids as ALL WORK and NO PLAY! But it's no big secret that the kids appreciation of baseball, as well as their ability to enjoy playing the game, seems to grow proportionately with their ability to compete.

PLAY CATCH: I Know, I Know. It's Boring!

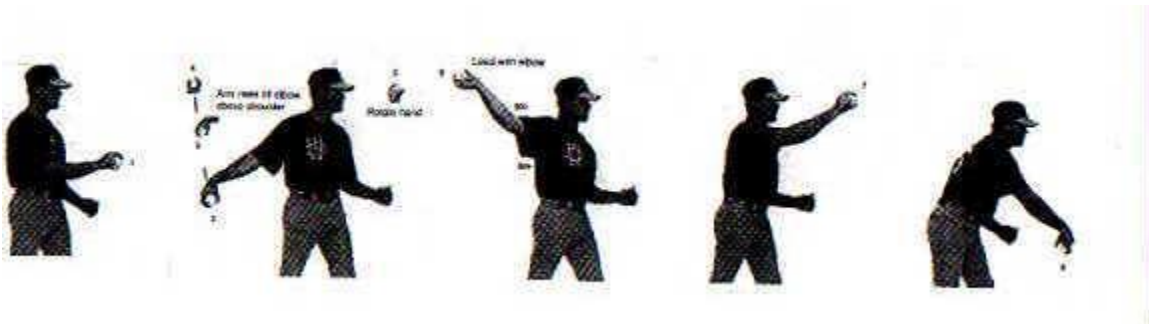
(See Drills below for fun & challenging variations.)

This is the single most important activity you, as an adult, can do to enhance their baseball abilities. Playing catch properly teaches and reinforces two of the most important aspects of the game: catching the ball & throwing the ball.

CATCHING THE BALL: Always have your player move toward the ball and try to catch it in the center of the body with two hands. There are many players who still possess a real fear of the baseball. Going to the ball and becoming confident in their ability to catch the ball is the only way to overcome this fear. The obvious benefit of catching with 2 hands is the prevention of the ball popping out of the glove. Another important benefit of catching with 2 hands is the quick transition of the ball from the glove to the throwing hand. Another key element in playing catch is "Fingers Up, Fingers Down," depending on whether the ball is above or below the belly button. Discourage "slapping" at the low ball with the fingers up. Throw them line drives, ground balls, pop ups, short hops, etc. Have them get low on ground balls. Get that head down. Look

for the button on top of their hats as they field grounders.
(You should be able to see it when they are doing it properly.)

THROWING THE BALL: Be sure to always have players stretch their arms. **DON'T** let them pick up a ball until their arm is warm. When throwing the ball, get those front (glove) shoulders pointing straight at the target. Step toward the target when throwing the ball, and follow through. Get those arms bent at the elbow, up above the shoulder, when throwing the ball ("Down, Back & Up"). (Coaching Cue: Thumb to the Thigh, Knuckles to the Sky.) Elbow comes through first followed by hand and ball, fingers on top of the ball. Use the 4-seam grip. Follow through on your throws by bringing the *Throwing Side Hip* around on your follow through. In throwing, work on keeping the throwing elbow UP. Don't sling it, push it or side-arm it. Throwing "over the top" increases strength, velocity and accuracy. It also protects the arm from injury.



You can play catch almost all year round. Try to encourage the kids to keep their gloves close by in the offseason. Playing catch develops throwing techniques, receiving techniques and footwork more than any single thing you do.

Talk to your players' parents. Stress to them the importance of proper catching and throwing techniques. Encourage them to play catch with their kids.

DRILLS

LONG TOSS: This is a great way to develop arm strength and it helps lengthen a players' arm. This is especially useful for players who "push" the ball in their throwing motion.

Start the players at 30 feet apart and gradually have them back up, eventually getting to 75 80 feet. Be sure your players aren't straining to throw. Have them utilize the "crow hop."

QUICK HANDS: Separate players into pairs. Place them 30 40 feet apart. (You should now have 2 lines of players.) Create a race to see which pair can successfully throw and catch the most times in a 30-second period. If a ball is thrown away or dropped, they must go back to zero!

RUNNING BASES: Put a fielder at both first and second base. Put helmets on your runners. Let the kids just run wild between 1st & 2nd base. Tell your fielders to get as many outs as they can in a 1-minute period. This is a fun game for both runners and fielders alike, as the fielders must learn to both throw and catch "under pressure" at a fast pace. They really need to be able to catch and throw the ball very quickly. They will also have to throw accurately. They will be forced to learn how to apply fast tags. They will start to understand the do's and don'ts of rundowns. This is a great learning game that happens to be a lot of fun.

REMEMBER: Throwing and catching improvement is done over time, with literally thousands of repetitions.