

# BASEBALL BASICS

## THROWING AND RECEIVING

### CATCH PLAYING

Throwing mechanics are the foundation of any successful player, regardless of age. Proper and effective throwing fundamentals not only prepare the player but also add to team preparation. And, yes it makes games and practices more fun. The following set of fundamentals and drills will guide each player to develop sound and effective throwing mechanics. These fundamentals are effective for both pitchers and position players. Remember that the coach needs to supervise these drills. Repetition of correct fundamentals leads to the formation of proper, effective and long lasting GOOD habits. Likewise, repetition of improper and fundamentally poor habits leads to ineffective habits and potential arm injury.

Mechanically sound and efficient throwing techniques are the cornerstone of baseball. Playing catch at any age level and playing it well, is a key to building successful players and to maintaining the sanity of coaches. “Play catch and throw strikes”, a basic plea by coaches at all levels, is often paid lip service. The following fundamentals are meant to give coaches and players the tools to effectively “play catch and throw strikes”.

### MECHANICS OF THROWING THE BALL

1. **Grip across the big “C”** – Position player’s need a straight line throw to their target. Across the wide part of the seams that form the letter C gives them the best opportunity to achieve this objective. Pitchers, on the other hand, want movement. Experiment with other grips and finger pressures to achieve this. The grip is also determined by the size of the hands and age of the player. Younger players with smaller hands might need to use three or even 4 fingers to grip the ball. Two fingers across the “C” is the usual and most effective grip. With practice and repetition your players will be able to achieve this grip consistently.
2. **Get the ball out of the glove** – The first critical move to insure proper throwing mechanics is to remove the ball from the glove. This is done by bringing the ball out of the bottom of the glove. Your player needs to have his thumb, finger tips and the ball facing the ground. The back of his hand will be facing the sky. The thumb will start a circular motion leading to proper hand position above his shoulder.
3. **Body position** – As the ball is being removed from the glove the player must adjust his feet and upper body to the direction he is planning to throw. This is accomplished by stepping with his throwing side foot and turning his throwing shoulder in a direct line to his target. A rhythm will be developed with experience and continued practice. This is easily described to your players by using the terms “right over left” for right handed throwers or “left over right” for left handed throwers. Use the term “pop your feet” to help the player understand the rhythm and quickness needed for this action.
4. **Glove side or directional side** – The glove hand also makes a thumb down movement as the ball is removed from the glove. We call this an equal but opposite

- movement. This will give the player a straight line or effective throwing direction to his target.
5. **Equal and opposite** – Picture your player with both elbows equal in height to his shoulders. His throwing arm forms an “L” position with the palm of his throwing hand facing away from his head. The palm of his glove hand and his thumb are facing comfortably towards the ground. The shoulders are now directly lined up in a straight line to his target. His head and eyes are also directly turned to his target. This position is the result of the player getting to the proper body and foot position.
  6. **Throwing arm** – The “L” position creates a position of power for the player. His elbow is equal to or his shoulder. This gives the player a position of leverage. Also this position will give the player the best opportunity for an accurate throw.
  7. **Hand position** – The hand is on top of the ball with the fingers and thumb facing away from the head or specifically the ear of the player. The player can look back at his hand and see the back of his hand. Be alert for the player's hand and ball facing the sky. This position will cause a number of problems with the throw. The appearance of the hand is like that of the Cobra in its striking position.
  8. **Release of the ball** – The key to an effective release is the player keeping his throwing elbow at the height he achieved in the “L” position. This is accompanied by his glove side staying in a straight line or directed to his target. The release should be slightly in front of his head. A good visual picture for your player is to have him release the ball as close to his target as he can. This will help him keep his throwing elbow at shoulder height at release. There should be a slight downward path or angle of the ball towards the target. This downward path is a good indicator that the ball was released at the proper point.
  9. **Follow through** – The finish of the throw is called the follow through. This is where the throwing side of the body will rotate towards the target. The foot under the throwing arm will turn, the hip and shoulder will move in the direction of the throw. A coaching point for your players is to have the back side follow them through the target. Also have them roll or turn the laces of their back shoe to the target.
  10. **Be ready for the next throw** – Throwing in practice needs to be geared towards game conditions. This means that your players need to develop rhythm, reaction and repetition during practice. Casual throwing interrupted by conversation and possibly chasing their partner's errant throw will slow down the progress of proper throwing mechanics.

### **Checklist for Throwing Mechanics**

1. Grip – Across the Big “C.” 2, 3 or 4 fingers might be used according to the age of your players.
2. Thumb, fingers and ball facing the ground as the ball is removed from the glove.
3. The thumb leads the hand to the “L” position.
4. Pop the feet- right over left or left over right.
5. Turn the glove side towards the target as the feet are moved.
6. Equal and opposite – both elbows are at shoulder height.
7. Release the ball in front of the head – both eyes are locked on the target.

8. Create a slight downward path with the ball towards the target.
9. Throw through the target.
10. Follow through with your back side – roll the laces.
11. Be ready for the return throw.

## SELECTION OF DRILLS

### INDIVIDUAL DRILLS TO BUILD SOLID THROWING MECHANICS

- Wrist Flip – From a distance of 8 to 10 feet and facing each other (chest to chest), have the players utilize the “C” grip and flip the ball to their partner. Emphasize fingers pointing straight down to the ground after release. They should have a 12 to 6 backspin on the ball. Use no gloves and have the thrower use his glove hand to grip the throwing arm just below the wrist. This will help to emphasize the flip or wrist break. The throwing arm should be in the power “L” position, with the throwing elbow as high as or higher than the throwing shoulder. You can also do this drill laying flat on your back. This is especially effective if your player has trouble getting his arm to the “L” position. This is also effective in teaching catchers to achieve the 12 to 6 rotation. The flip should be with desired backspin directly above the release point. The partner should stand near the release point and catch the ball.
- 2-knee Catch – Players on both knees, kneel tall (butt off the heels). Turn the glove shoulder under the chin, glove elbow at equal height to shoulder. The glove should be in front of the chest, palm of hand or pocket of glove facing the chest. The throwing arm should be in the power “L” position. The ball is facing away from the head, the thumb pointing the same direction as the players’ nose. The throwing hand will be in the “cobra” position or similar to a relaxed position as if having just finished wave to someone behind them. Look to check that both arms are in proper position with elbows at shoulder height, especially in the early stages of this drill. Players should start 12-15 feet apart. Throw the ball through your partner’s chest. This drill should also emphasize TWO hands when catching the ball. After 12-15 throws, move the lines 2-3 steps further apart. 12-15 more throws should complete this drill. Emphasize follow through even to the point of having the payers let their momentum carry them forward, falling on their chest. Have them use their hands to break the fall.
- Chest to Chest – Start at the distance where you ended the 2-knee drill (approximately 25-30 feet apart). Emphasize the same fundamentals as the 2-knee drill. The players will develop a slight knee flexion and rhythm to their throw. Add the target zone of belt buckle (or belly button) to the button on the top of their cap and shoulder-to-shoulder. This is a no stride drill. Increase the distance to approximately 45 feet. This drill is especially effective for the upper body mechanics of throwing and also for developing arm strength.
- Power Position – Feet spread shoulder distance or slightly wider. Sideways to your partner with your glove side closest to them. The lead foot (glove side foot) is slightly angled in. Start with the ball in your glove, hands together at chest

height or no higher than your chin. Approximately 70% of your weight is on the pivot or back foot. A slight weight shift or rocking back to gain rhythm is suggested. Emphasize the ball escaping the bottom of the glove, thumb first. The glove hand rotates in a thumb down manner as the ball leaves the bottom of the glove. These 2 thumbs down movements will allow the elbows to move to a position where they are at an equal height with the shoulders. The shoulders and elbows should be in a straight line to their partner or target. The throwing arm is in the power “L” position; hand in the “cobra” position. The chin is aligned with the shoulder and glove side elbow. The head is upright, not tilted to either side. Emphasize the backside or throwing side as the starting or trigger of the throw. The pitching hand and the ball start is the main starting device. Shoulders stay aligned with the partner or target. Emphasize a downward plane of the ball and release as close to the partner as possible. The follow through is characterized by a rolling over on the shoelaces of the pivot foot. Also look to be sure that the chest is extended over the stride or lead leg. Remember, this is a NO stride drill. Start this drill at 45 feet and move this back to 60 feet. Move back approximately 3 feet or one long step each five throws. A variation of this drill can be for the players to remove their hats and alternate throwing the ball to each side of the hat. You can also assign points to parts of your partners’ body, 1 point for the right hip, 2 points for the left knee, etc. Both of these activities help to improve accuracy and control.

- Step Catch, Step Throw – This is the actual “game catch” portion of the warm up routine. Emphasis should be on the following: rhythm, a quick foot movement to the ball, 2 hands on the catch, button to button and shoulder to shoulder target, and catching the ball on the throwing side of the body, Step to the ball as it is flight with your power foot or foot under your throwing arm. We want active feet. The pivot foot or power foot steps over the stride or glove side foot. Right over left for RH throwers, left over right for LH throwers. Start the distance of this drill at approximately 60 feet. The distance will be increased according to age and ability. Always maintain proper mechanics and stress accuracy. Use as your guide the distances of the longest throw that could be made during a game. Your players should end their catch playing at this distance or longer. Throwing distances that elongate the throwing process will lead to increased arm strength.
- Long Catch and Hat Drill – From a distance equal to the longest game throw, have the players put their hats 10-15 feet in front of them, on the ground. The hats will serve as a target for their partners. The goal is to hit the hat and have the throw take one long hop to their partner. You can make this motivational and competitive. Emphasis should be on throws that attain a height no higher than the glove extended over the partner's head. Lollipop or rainbow throws usually mean that either the distance is too great or that there is a breakdown in fundamentals. Again, distance should be age appropriate. These long toss throws should be limited to 3-4 at the beginning of the season and increased to 8-10 as the season progresses and arms get in better shape.
- Big Bounce – This drill is useful for those players that have trouble mastering the "elbow up" concept so important to safe and accurate catch playing. Use a tennis ball, soft core or regular baseball. Have the player start with the elbow in the power L position. Take a step with the power foot and release the ball directly into the ground trying to create a high bounce. The ball should strike the ground

about 6 - 8 feet in front of the player. You can incorporate a mat for a higher bounce or do this on the blacktop/concrete with a tennis ball for the same effect. The high bounce is a good indication to both the player and the coach of the effectiveness of this drill. 10- 15 repetitions per time are adequate.

## RELATED GROUP THROWING DRILLS

- 4-corner catch – This drill emphasizes quick feet and learning to follow your glove hand around as you change directions to throw. Position 4 players so that they each form a corner of a square. They are 30 feet apart. Start with the ball at any corner of the square. Throw the ball to the player directly in front, the receiver then spins and following his glove hand around he then throws to the player his right. Continue in the same direction for 3 trips around the square, and then reverse it. 3 more times and then throw diagonal, then to the player in front of you and next to the player to your right or left. Squares can be of any distance. 45, 60, 90, 120 or as far as 150 feet. The size of your facility and the ages of the players will determine the distances you use.
- Relay drill – 3 or 4 players to form a line, each from 15 to 30 feet apart. Start the ball at either end of the line. The receiver of the ball should do the following: keep feet moving, have hands together, palms facing each other, chest high and in front of his chest; power side (throwing side) facing the thrower and catch the ball on their throwing side (you must move your feet to maintain effective body position) and then make an accurate throw to the next player. When the ball reaches the other end of the line, reverse the direction, Have the players change positions in the line after the ball has gone up and down the line 2 times. If there is a bad throw and there will be, have the line move as one, saying aligned, until the ball is retrieved. Then continue the drill. Have the player always pick up the ball off the ground with their throwing hand. You can do this drill with the players lined up from the outfield fence to home plate. This will help to introduce the cut off/relay concept. This drill lends itself to game like competition and playing catch under pressure. Divide your team in groups of 3-4-5 players and set up competition. This really emphasizes the importance of effective catch playing.
- Timed catch – Have the players and a partner line up 30-60 feet apart. Start the ball with the players on one side of the line. They have a predetermined time to see how many catches they can successfully make. The first catch counts with the catch of the first throw. Usually a 15-20 second time period is used. This drill is particularly useful for infielders and catchers.
- Wheel drill – This drill is very effective when there is only one coach and for beginners. The coach stands in the middle of a group of players that have formed a circle around him. The distance from the coach will vary according to the age and skill level of the players. Usually, 15-20 feet in the beginning and moving back to 30 feet as the players improve. The coach designates one player to begin. The players can be in any of the basic throwing positions as described in the catch playing section. The coach uses a voice command for the player to throw. The coach will catch the ball; make appropriate comments concerning the throw, using the 3-1 ratio of positive to corrective statements. Then the next player throws and

so forth. The coach has a very effective environment for observing, coaching and assessment of the progress of his players.

## CATCHING THE THROWN BALL

Thumbs together, fingers up, fingers relaxed, elbows bent eyes track the ball into the glove, catch it like an egg, give with your hands, secure the ball with your throwing hand, move your feet. These are all verbal cues and visual pictures that will help a young or inexperienced player learn to catch a thrown ball. Let's investigate each of these cues, put them in their proper order and find out the importance of each.

1. **Thumbs Together** – This cue will begin the recognition of the 2 handed catch and how important it is to successful catch playing. Thumbs together with the hands in a relaxed position, almost like you were loosening your fingers to begin playing the piano. This position will allow the glove to be open to the ball and the pocket and web facing the incoming throw. This point is especially important for infielders. **(picture or illustration). 4 pictures**
2. **Fingers Up – Fingers Down** – Using the waist or belt buckle as a point of reference as you bend your knees will determine which way your fingers will point. As you bend your knees the ball will appear to be below your line of sight. That is the time to turn your fingers down to catch the ball. The ball that allows you to keep your eyes above the top of the glove, knees bent or standing up right, as you catch the ball, means fingers up. Using tennis or wiffle balls to introduce this concept will enhance the confidence of the players. **(picture or illustration) 4 pictures**
3. **Fingers and Hands Relaxed** – Have your players extend their hands and stiffen their fingers. This is an awkward and tense feeling and will cause a “hands of stone” reaction to catching a ball. From this uncomfortable hand position, have the players roll their hands forward and then lift them to the “thumbs together” position. The contrasting feelings of tension and relaxation will give them the proper and effective feeling of how to catch the thrown ball. It's like catching an egg without letting it break in your hand. **(pictures or illustrations) 2 pictures**
4. **Elbows Bent** – Stiff, straight elbows and arms create the tension and likely hood of that awkward “hands of stone” reaction as described in the previous paragraph. Elbows bent also means that your elbows should be pointing to the ground with your arms comfortably close to your sides. Using a similar technique as mentioned in the previous paragraph, have the player extend their arms in a straight out, elbow locked position. Toss them a tennis or wiffle ball, with out a glove on and not allowing them to bend their arms. Then do the same short toss with them having the correct flexion or bend. Employ the soft hands, thumbs together, relaxed hands concepts. You should be on your way to teaching the players the successful concepts of catching a thrown ball. **(pictures and illustrations 2 pictures)**
5. **Track the Ball – Use Your Eyes** – Your eyes are the key to consistent catch playing. Using both eyes together, from the release of the ball to its secured entry into your glove is essential for successful catch playing. Tracking the ball or using both eyes to converge on the ball from release to catch takes practice. Young players tend to let their eyes wander, especially at the critical point of the ball entering their glove. In some cases this is caused by fear of the ball or a lack of training their hands and eyes

to work together. Looking the ball into the pocket or web of the glove with both eyes, until the ball is secured is a habit that must be learned. The same technique should be employed when throwing the ball. Stay on target with your eyes until your partner or the player to which you are throwing catches the ball. Starting with short toss by the coach with tennis, wiffle or soft-core balls and NO gloves will begin the training of hand-eye coordination. A one-bounce throw from short distance will also help to increase the training of the hands and the eyes working together.

**(pictures and illustrations) 2 pictures**

6. **Secure the Ball – 2 Hands** – Regardless of all the highlight films and web gems showing exciting one handed plays and catches, ALL MLB players started their training using two hands to catch and secure the thrown ball. This fundamental really comes into play in game situations. When a catch needs to be made, two hands for security and making the OUT are the important factors. 2 hands for the catch are easily accomplished when the previously listed fundamentals are emphasized and practiced. Thumbs together allows the player to use their throwing hand to secure the ball in their glove. As the ball enters the glove the throwing hand quickly covers the pocket and web of the glove. This should occur on each ball that is caught whether it is a thrown ball, ground ball or fly ball. The obvious point to be made to your players is to practice the timing of this fundamental so that you do not put the throwing hand in front of the glove until the ball has entered the glove. Usually the player only makes this mistake ONCE. **(pictures and illustrations 2 pictures)**
7. **Keep the Ball on your Throwing Side – Move Your Feet** – To consistently use two hands and make game speed catches and throws you have to learn to move your feet and maintain an effective relationship to the ball. Players need to expect a bad throw and be ready to move their feet and body to make the catch. Breaking the “reach for it” or “easy/lazy way” to play catch can be a challenge. This underscores the importance of the coach being actively involved in catch playing and warm-up. Coaches can begin this process by again using short toss with bad or off center throws. Emphasize that each player makes their first step with the foot on the side that the ball is thrown. Also emphasize the use 2 hands. Only make throws that allow the players to use two hands. **(pictures and illustrations) 2-3 pictures**
8. **Getting a grip** – The final piece of this catch playing puzzle is being able to get the across the seams grip, in your glove, as you begin your throw. This can be accomplished with emphasizing this concept early on in the catch playing process for more experienced players. It probably should be one of the final concepts introduced if you are dealing with young, beginning level players. The big “C” of the seams is the main part of the ball we are referring to when we talk about “across the seams”. This is the logical end to the 2 hands concept. With both hands close together, attaining the proper grip will be much easier to accomplish. Start the players with the ball already in the glove and have them reach in and find the “C” of the seams, without looking at the ball. Repeat this until the players confirm that they have successfully achieved the grip 5 times in a row. It only takes a 1/16<sup>th</sup> of a turn of the ball to achieve this grip. This grip is the only grip that should be allowed in practice and drills. Then start the catch playing. Players should see the 6 o’clock – 12 o’clock rotation of the ball that will create a much straighter and hopefully more accurate throw. The grip can be practiced by having the players throw into a net, a wall or directly on the ground in front of them. If they throw on the ground they should try

and create a high, big bounce. This drill is also very effective in creating the “elbow up” aspect in proper throwing mechanics. **(pictures and illustrations) 2 pictures**

### **Checklist for Catching the Thrown Ball**

1. Have both hands ready for the catch. The hands should be in front of the chest, thumbs and fingers pointing up and palms comfortably facing forward.
2. Eyes on the ball. Track it into the glove
3. Open the glove to the ball. Expose the entire pocket of the glove to the ball
4. Catch the ball in the pocket of the glove.
5. Catch the ball in the center of your body.
6. Catch the ball with relaxed hands.
7. Cover or secure the ball in the glove with your throwing hand.
8. Get the grip across the Big “C” in the glove.
9. Fingers up above the waist and if your player’s can bend their knees without turning the glove, fingers down
10. Fingers down on throws below thigh level or if they cannot bend their knees to make the catch, fingers up
11. Pick up balls off the ground with the throwing hand. They can use the glove and hand together especially if the ball is rolling.
12. Keep their feet moving. Anticipate the next throw and catch.

## **SELECTION OF DRILLS**

### **DRILLS RELATED TO CATCHING THE THROWN BALL**

- Wall drills – This drill is best suited for catching ground balls or a high hopper. Have the player throw the ball against a wall or part of the backstop. They assume the fundamental fielding position and repeat this for 15-20 repetitions. Either soft core or regular baseballs can be used. Using a glove or no glove is an option. The use of the soft hands or paddle device is also very effective for this drill.
- Bounce and catch – This is especially effective for beginning players or for school visits. Have the players bounce the ball to themselves and catch it. This helps to train the eyes and develop the hand eye concept. This hand eye concept can be challenging for kids who are used to using their feet in a soccer-dominated society. Next, have the players divide into pairs and bounce the ball back and forth to each other. In some cases the coach might need to be the person doing the bouncing. Soft-core balls or tennis balls are most effective for this drill.
- Soft hands – This drill will need a teaching device that can either be purchased or made. Wood, hard plastic or thick neoprene will work. Attach finger holds on the back. There are 3 or 4 versions manufactured and available for purchase. This type of device creates the need to use 2 hands to catch and secure the ball. You can

use this teaching device for fly balls, groundballs or thrown balls. This device is effective for beginners and for revisiting fundamentals for all ages.

- No glove drills – Tennis balls, golf ball size wiffle balls, and baseball size wiffle balls can all be used for this drill. This is effective for beginners and for school situations where there are not many gloves available. The smaller wiffle balls are excellent for training the eyes and hands to work together. The palms together, thumbs up concept should be emphasized.
- Catch on the run – Throwing the ball to players that are on the run to either side or running directly away from the thrower help to create game catch concepts. This also teaches the players to run on their toes so the ball doesn't bounce in their line of sight as they are running. You can use softer balls for beginners. Sometimes the no glove concept can be used along with the soft balls.

### **CATCH PLAYING CREDO FOR PLAYERS AND COACHES**

- Coach during the catch playing and throwing fundamental part of practice. This is not a social time for either you or the players.
- Hold the players accountable for accuracy. Make the thrower chase the ball.
- Two hands on all catches. All catches!!
- Pick up all balls on the ground with your throwing hand.
- Maintain a safe space between team members in throwing lines to account for errant throws.
- Throw inside the foul lines, not standing on the foul lines. Field maintenance issue, same for not warming up on the infield.
- Sore biceps, lats and back are normal at the beginning of the year. Sore elbows and shoulders should be taken seriously. Keep parents informed.
- Remember, proper throwing mechanics prevent injury. Be vigilant, and pay attention.
- Add quick catch; relay drills and 4 corner catch to your catch playing for both variety and fundamental practice.
- Functional catch, from simulating GB's, Fly Balls and Catcher throws is also effective.

### **RECOMMENDED THROWING ROUTINE**

The types of throwing drills that we have described in the basic throwing section are drills that need to be mastered by all levels and age groups. Throwing a baseball is the basic skill that all player's need to become proficient at if they want to continue to play and enjoy the game of baseball. The following routines are geared towards building arm strength, creating a healthy basis for arm care and injury prevention and to allow the player to meet the specific demands of each position. Each routine will have an age specific component.

## THROWING ROUTINE FOR THE SIX TO EIGHT YEAR OLD PLAYER

The emphasis with this age group is proper throwing fundamentals. Remember that the size of the players hands and the relative lack of arm strength will be key determinates in this routine.

### 1. First day of practice through the first half of the season

#### 2 knee throwing

- Start from 10 to 12 feet apart – 15 throws with the coaches paying close attention to proper fundamentals.
  - Chest to chest – 15 to 18 feet apart – 15 throws with the coaches monitoring throwing fundamentals. Remind the players to aim at the chest of their throwing partners
  - Power L position – 22 to 28 feet apart – 15 throws – Coaches closely monitor the elbow positions of the players. Pay attention to both elbows (equal and opposite). Have the players check their own elbow positions by pausing to check the height of their elbows before actually throwing the ball.
  - Step, catch, step throw – Start this from 30 feet and progress to a distance where your players can be accurate with their throws. Accuracy will be determined by the player throwing into the area at the waist or belt buckle of his partner, no higher than the top of their partner's head and no wider than the width of his shoulders. Increase the distance as your player's accuracy and arm strength improve. 25 – 30 throws in the beginning of the season and a maximum distance of 45 – 60 feet. Increase the throws to 90 – 100 feet or to the longest throw you player's would have to make in a game.
  - Long hop throwing or the hat drill – Start this after the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> week. Have your player's take off their hats and set them on the ground, 10 to 12 feet in front of them. Each player will try and throw the ball so that the ball will take one long hop and be caught by their partner. Use the hat as a target. 10 to 12 throws from a distance that the player's can successfully achieve the long hop.
2. The number of throws that each player can safely and successfully attempt needs to be monitored by you and your assistants. The shorter distance throws will put less of a strain on your player's arms as will proper technique. The routine described above will have your players throw approximately 75 throws without the hat drill and 85 to 90 with the hat drill included. Assess your player's progress and then include some of the following drills in your routine. You can delete the chest to chest and power L if you feel it is warranted by the progress of your players.
- Four corner catch for foot work and quickness.
  - Wheel drill for those players that need extra work on fundamentals
  - Quick or timed catch – partners keep track of the number of catches in a timed segment, usually for 15 or 20 seconds. The players should be 25 to 30 feet apart. This drill stresses the step catch, step throw techniques
  - Game catch on the infield – Include your catcher's in this drill. Start the drill with the catcher throwing the ball to the SS who then throws to the 1B, he throws to the 3B, 3B to the 2B and 2B back to the catcher. Repeat, change the throwing

order and remove the player's who make poor throws until only one player is left. Repeat as needed.

Soreness in the bicep, forearm and latissimus dorsi are a common occurrence. This soreness does not indicate an arm injury, only a tired arm that is getting stronger. Young player's and their parents need to be alerted to this condition and informed of its causes. **An important reminder for coaches:** Your frequency of practice will alter your throwing routines. Practices on successive days will more than likely reduce the number of throws. Conversely, practices once a week will slow down the progress towards developing proper throwing fundamentals and building arm strength. Be alert to the frequency of your player's throwing routines. Encourage them to play catch on their own time.

### **THROWING ROUTINE FOR THE 9 TO 12 YEAR OLD PLAYER**

The nine to twelve year old player is playing on a field of Little League dimensions. This means that the longest possible throw for players of this age group will be approximately 200 feet. This throw would be from the outfield fence to home plate. Here are some important points to consider as you develop throwing routines for this age group:

- Start with the basic group of throwing drills at each practice and continue as needed.
- The frequency of your practices will determine the progress your players will make in developing proper technique and arm strength.
- Be alert to the variety of different throwing abilities and arm strength. Put players of like arm strength as partners. Players who are not sure of their ability to catch the thrown ball should not be partnered with players that throw hard.
- Do more team and individual defensive drills as the season progresses. The bulk of the players throwing will take place in these situations.
- Pitching now becomes an issue. You will need to plan your throwing routines to include pitching as part of your practice. Also realize that your pitchers will put more stress on their arms and require more rest and recovery between their pitching appearances. This means for both games and pitching practice.
- Your pitchers will be playing another position. You will need to be alert to the total number of throws they make each week in all situations. These situations include warm ups, defensive drills, pitching practice and pitching in games.
- Use common sense. Young arms are fragile, especially considering that the players are still growing and developing physically. Over use of the arm is a major concern and needs to be monitored by you.
- Youth leagues have pitching limits on the number of innings a pitcher can throw each week. Your responsibility is to monitor this and the number of pitches that your player throws in each appearance. A good rule is to put a 75 pitch limit on your more mature players usually your 11 and 12 year olds. Reduce this number to 30 – 40 pitches for the younger players.
- Balance rest and throwing activity. For any muscle to get stronger it must be used and be pushed to point of fatigue. The young player needs to throw to develop technique and arm strength. Pitches need rest between pitching sessions. A good

way to approach this is to have your pitchers play catch between pitching in game but include at least one day of no throwing.

- Avoid the temptation of over using your best pitcher in the “win at all cost” approach. If your player has talent remember that his future in baseball will hopefully continue for many more seasons.

### 1. **First day of practice through the first half of the season**

- Use the basic throwing routines as outlined in the basic throwing section starting with the following number of throws in each.

1. **2 knee** – 20 throws from 15 feet
2. **Chest to chest** – 20 to 25 throws starting from 20 feet and increasing to 35 feet. Move your players back every 5 to 8 throws.
3. **Power L** – 15 to 20 throws starting from 35 feet increasing to 45 feet.
4. **Step catch, step throw** – 25 to 35 throws beginning at 45 feet and increasing to a distance 90 to **125 feet a the players arms get stronger.**
5. **Long toss and hat drill** – Do this one or two times a week. Start this after the players have been throwing for at least two weeks.

- Pitchers – Pitching practice should begin in the second week of practice. The practice should be monitored by a coach. The pitcher should be following a program much like the following:

1. **Day One** – 30 to 35 pitches. All fast balls. Introduce proper mechanics and technique. Count the pitches! Pitch off a mound if possible.
2. **Day Two** – There should be a one or two day break between day 1 and 2. 30 to 35 pitches for day two also. Stress mechanics, count pitches and pitch off a mound if possible. Have the catcher in full catcher’s gear.

- Pitchers Week Two

1. **Day One** – 40 pitches for the younger pitchers. 45 to 50 for the older pitchers. Emphasize strike throwing.
2. **Day Two** – Same number of pitches. Emphasize strike throwing.

- Pitchers Week Three

1. **Day One** – 50 to 65 pitches. Include other players as a stander in the batter’s box. They must be wearing a helmet. This will give your pitchers a game feel and also help your hitters track a pitched ball.
2. **Day Two** – Plan your practice for your pitchers to throw batting practice. They should throw to 3 – 5 hitters or no more than 40 pitches.

- Pitchers Week Three, Four and Remainder of the Season – At the end of the third week you will need to determine game schedules, those players who will be your pitchers and how you will use them. Your plans should include a short practice session from the mound for your pitchers each week.

## **THROWING ROUTINES FOR PLAYERS ON A REGULATION FIELD**

The transition from a smaller youth field to the regulation diamond is a challenge for many players. The major challenge is found in the increased throwing distances. Your routines will now need to incorporate longer distances in the catch playing/warm up portion of your

practice. Also defensive drills for the new player on the regulation field will be frustrating until the players get used to the increased distances.

Game condition and situational throwing will become your major emphasis. Game catch as previously discussed, cut off and relay throws, infield and outfield practice will a majority of your throwing routines. Pitching will need to be addressed in a similar manner. Active rest. The amount of throws each week both in practice and in games should be monitored. Older, more mature players need to have arm care as well as the younger ones.

### **PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

The continued emphasis on catch playing, throwing effectively and accurately, and employing fundamentally friendly drills is a must. Using a variety of these drills at each practice or school session will not only enhance the progress of the players but also keep their interest. There are no short cuts or quick fixes when it comes to both teaching and acquiring the fundamentals of catching and throwing a baseball. There can and probably will be periods of frustration for both the coach and the player as they work together to grasp these fundamental concepts. The importance of keeping things positive, using the 3 to 1 positive to corrective comment ratio and employing patience, patience, and more patience will go along way to over coming the shared frustration of both coach and athlete. Catch playing should be incorporated in every practice. Be mindful that early in the season your player's arms will likely be out of throwing shape. Building arm strength and proper mechanics is a process that needs to be started gradually and monitored constantly