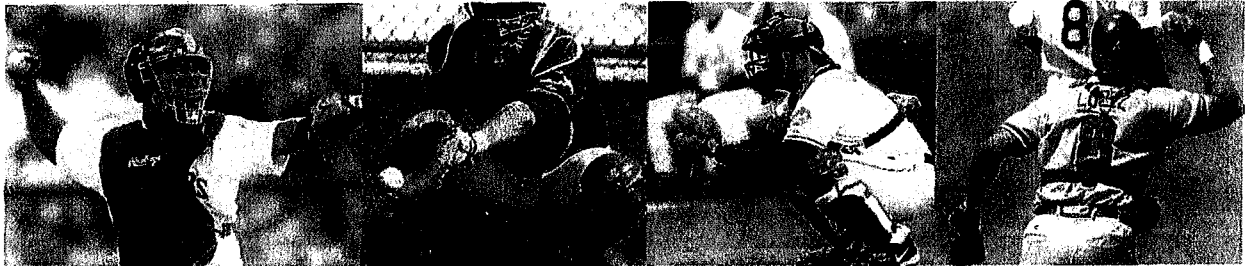


European Academy



# Catching Development Plan



## Catching Development Plan

*Bob Didier – Arizona Diamondbacks*

Developing quality major league catchers may be one of the most difficult aspects of player development. The task of developing fundamentally strong catchers rests in our understanding of the demands of the position and characteristics it takes to withstand those demands and be a competitive offensive player at the same time. Developing the basic fundamentals and the immense mental responsibilities of catchers creates a road map to the Major Leagues.

### *Foundations of a Good Catcher*

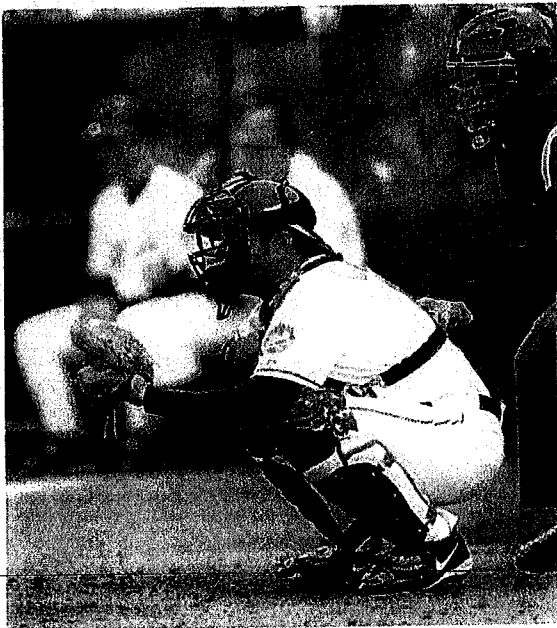
- **Stances**

- **Signal Stance**

- Feet should be square to the pitcher about a foot apart.
- Body should split the plate in half.
- Left knee should point at straight up SS position.
- Right knee should be closed enough so a runner on 1<sup>st</sup> base cannot see.
- Glove should extend beyond left knee to guard against the 3<sup>rd</sup> base coach.
  - Throwing arm should rest in hip flexor crevice with elbow tucked in.
  - Hand should be even with cup. Be aware not to give sign too high or too low.
  - Catcher should check positioning of batter in the box and be aware of peeking.

- **Receiving Stance**

- After giving the sign, the catcher should shift into a comfortable but fundamentally sound receiving position.
- A quiet move to the proper location inside or outside should be at the right time so that the hitter cannot see it and runners on base cannot relay location.



Paul Lo Duca of the New York Mets in a comfortable but fundamentally sound receiving position.

- Feet should remain shoulder width apart with weight on the inside of the feet and toes turned slightly out.
- Glove arm should be slightly extended to give a good target.
- Glove positioning should be with fingers pointed to the sky. This will allow the elbow to remain tucked and give the pitcher an open glove target.
- Glove should be visible and not move until the pitcher releases the pitch.
- Target should be at the bottom of the strike zone.
- Position within the catcher's box will vary according to the hitter. Always stay as close to the hitter without interfering.
- Bare hand should be behind right heel, behind glove, or by right groin.



Gregg Zaun of the Toronto Blue Jays receives a pitch with runners on base. Notice how his throwing hand is behind his glove and his stance is slightly upright and athletic.

- **Throwing/Blocking Stance**
  - With runners on base or with two strikes on the hitter, a modified receiving stance becomes a more athletic throwing/blocking position.
  - Feet should be shoulder width apart with weight on the balls of the feet.
  - Knees should be inside the ankles with rear elevated somewhat in a ready position.
  - Giving a good, open, and low target is still necessary. Remember, “fingers to the sky.”
  - Bare hand should be in a comfortable place behind the glove. No tension!

## ● *The Art of Receiving*

Receiving is a skill that can be developed if worked on properly. As an organization, we must educate our catchers so they understand the value quality receivers have in baseball. The better a catcher receives pitches, the easier it is to advance him throughout the system.

- **Keep Your Eyes On the Ball!**
  - A good receiver always follows the ball into the glove with his eyes.
- **Always Give A Good Target!**
  - Proper positioning of the glove makes receiving easier. Remember, “Fingers to the sky!”
- **Beat the Ball To the Spot!**
  - Anticipating where the ball is going to be when it crosses the plate and getting the glove to that spot before the ball gets there allows for a strong handle of the pitch. Failure to get the glove in position will let the velocity of the pitch dominate the glove. Catchers should not let the force of the pitch carry their glove out of the strike zone.
  - Catching the outside parts of the ball for inside and outside pitches; top of the ball for high pitches; and bottom of the ball for low pitches will put catchers in position to receive them correctly.

- **Be Soft and Firm When Receiving Pitches!**
  - It is necessary to have some softness and some firmness to receive correctly and efficiently.
  - Catchers should be firm and “stick” pitches to present them to the umpire.
  - Catchers should also be soft enough not to jab at the ball and drop many pitches.



Josh Bard of the San Diego Padres receives a pitch in practice. Note how he catches the ball out in front of his body.

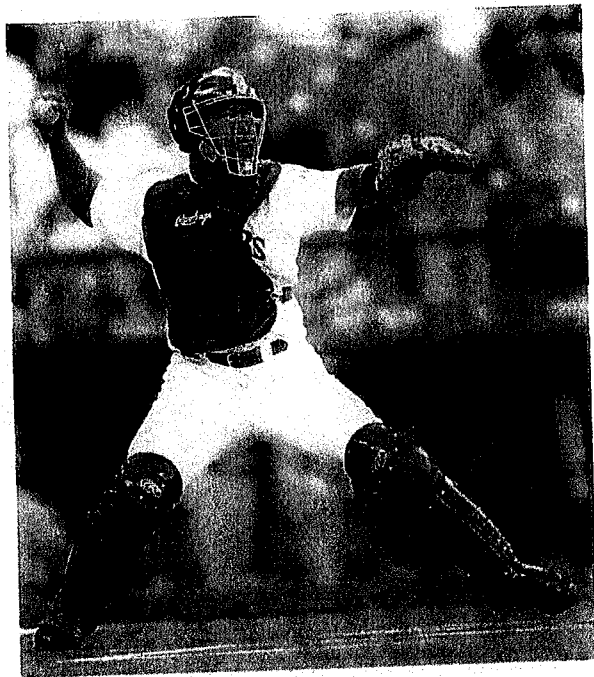
- **Catch the Ball Out In Front of the Body!**
  - Give the umpire a good look at the pitch.
  - More strikes will be called the closer a catcher catches the ball to the plate.
- **Catch Strikes!**
  - Catch all the strikes that are in the zone. Let them be strikes.
- **Catch the Borderline Pitches Correctly!**
  - Pitches that are borderline balls or strikes are the ones catchers can affect the most.
  - The catcher should keep his fingers to the sky and move his glove side to side in handling inside and outside borderline pitches.
  - The catcher should avoid pointing his thumb to the ground when receiving pitches.
  - Shifting body weight a little adds to the perception that a borderline pitch is a strike.

- **Let the Obvious Balls Be Balls!**
  - A catcher should never try to make an obvious ball look like a strike. That will only irritate the umpire and is an unnecessary action.
- **A Good Catcher Goes Unnoticed!**
  - One of the biggest compliments to a good receiving catcher is that he is unnoticeable. Limited glove and body movement and catching the ball cleanly makes for a very good receiving catcher.
  - Do not be in a hurry to jump up on strike three.

## ● ***Throwing Mechanics***

The most common fallacy about catching is that the most important aspect of a catcher's throwing ability is his arm strength. While it is important for a catcher to have a strong arm, it is equally, if not more, important for a catcher to have good hands, agile feet, and overall good athletic ability to be a good throwing catcher. Strong armed catchers who fail to throw runners out often times make errors in footwork or transfer at the beginning of the task. It is an athletic combination of

quick feet, secure transfer, strong arm, and accurate aim that leads to a successful throwing catcher.



Miguel Olivo of the Seattle Mariners throws to second. Note that the front foot and front shoulder are both pointing directly at the target.

#### ○ Footwork

- The most important part of a catcher's footwork is consistency.
- On throws to 2<sup>nd</sup> Base, there are two ways to utilize proper footwork.
- Pivot: As the ball approaches, the catcher pivots his right foot and throws to second base. A strong arm is required for this footwork.
- Jab Step: this is used by most catchers in baseball. The catcher jab steps with his right foot to an area on the ground just below his chin at the center of his body. It is crucial to keep the catcher's footwork confined to an imaginary circle around him. This enables short, compact footwork which initiates quickness.
- Regardless of which footwork is used, the catcher must make his back foot become parallel to the front edge of the plate and his front toe pointed directly towards 2<sup>nd</sup> Base.

- On throws to 3<sup>rd</sup> Base the catcher must always work to clear himself if a right handed hitter is at the plate. If positioned deep in the box correctly, the catcher should have somewhat of a straight line to 3<sup>rd</sup> Base. In extreme cases, a catcher may opt to go in front of the hitter on pitches low and away. Either way, the footwork should be confined and compact.

#### ○ Transfer

- The exchange is a critical part of the throwing process. Many errant throws are a result of bobbled transfers or bad grips.
- The catcher should make a two handed catch when receiving the ball.
- The transfer is made by picking the ball out of the glove, not *flipping* the ball to the bare hand.
- The transfer is made at the center of the body. Do not carry the glove side back to the throwing shoulder.
- The catcher should work on getting a strong first grip on the ball. 4 seams is a plus.

#### ○ Upper/Lower Body

- The catcher needs to stay as low and compact as possible while throwing.
- Legs should stay flexed throughout the throw.
- The catcher's front shoulder must be pointed in the direction of the throw before the throw is made.
- The catcher must work to use and clear his front side.

- The final key for a catcher is to finish his throw over a bent front leg. It is critical that the catcher does not RECOIL. Recoiling severely limits velocity and carry on the throw.

○ **Arm Action**

- The catcher uses the shortest arm action on the field.
- The catcher's throwing hand never drops below the glove.
- Fingers should stay on top of the ball.
- Catcher should imagine a dot on the inside of the wrist. That dot must be pointed in the direction of the throw.

● ***Blocking Balls in the Dirt***

The catcher must understand that it is his responsibility and commitment to block every ball in the dirt with runners on base or two strikes on the hitter. The key ingredient to successfully block balls in the dirt is ANTICIPATION. Knowing when and where the ball might be ensure proper reaction to balls in the dirt. As inglorious as blocking balls in the dirt can be, it provides an undeniable trust in the pitchers' confidence in throwing their best put away pitches in crucial situations. Blocking balls in the dirt is invaluable to team success.

○ **Always Anticipate Balls Being in the Dirt.**

- Cutting the distance between where the catcher is and where the ball bounces enables the ball to bounce off the chest protector. Gaining ground shortens the hop and creates a better angle.
  - The distance a catcher can cover will vary. The catcher's range will dictate the angle at which he cuts distance from left to right.
  - STRAIGHT AHEAD – Generally speaking, the catcher can cut distance or simply go to his knees as quickly as possible. The farther the ball is hitting in front of the plate, the more important it is to cut the distance.
  - LEFT OR RIGHT – A common angle at going left to right is 45 degrees to cut the ball off. The catcher should always try to block the "outside" of the ball to control where it bounces.



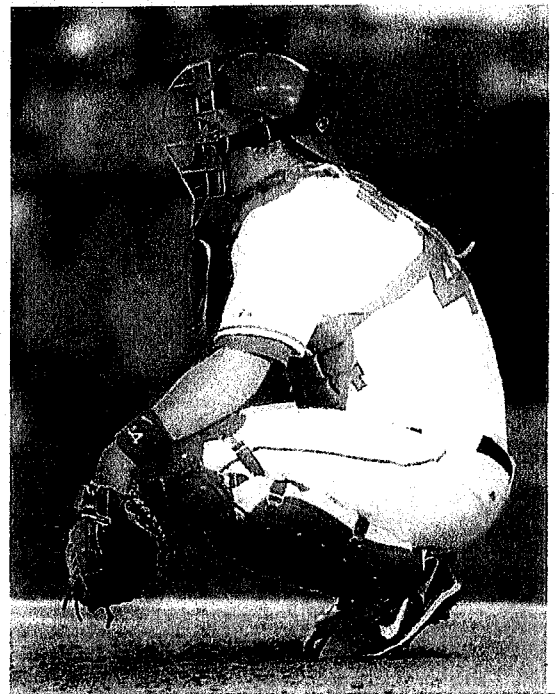
- Soft movements equate to control of the ball when it hits the catcher. The catcher must relax and let the ball hit him.
- After blocking the ball, the catcher must locate the ball quickly, get to his feet, and retrieve the ball. The actual blocking of the ball is only half the battle. Keeping the runners from advancing is the true measure of success.

Kenji Johjima of the Seattle Mariners blocks a ball in the dirt. Note the proper positioning of his knees, glove, elbows, chin, and chest.

- **FOUR PART CHECKLIST:** A catcher should keep the following keys of blocking balls in mind.
  - **KNEES**
    - Get both knees to the ground in the direction of the ball as quickly as possible.
    - Do not jump to your knees. Soft landings make for soft movements.
  - **GLOVE**
    - The catcher should lead with the glove and cover the hole between the legs with both the glove and bare hand. The bare hand should be entirely behind the glove. The glove should remain open at all times. The catcher should not try to catch the ball.
  - **ELBOWS**
    - The elbows should sink into the correct position when the hands are in the correct position. The ability to flare one's elbows out creates a bigger target for the ball to hit. In doing this, the catcher's shoulders will stay squared to the ball.
  - **CHIN**
    - The chin should go directly down to the chest to locate the ball on the ground.
    - This movement will cause the shoulders to round and be over the ball, creating a good angle for the ball to bounce off of the catcher.
    - The catcher needs to keep his eyes open to locate the ball quickly.

- **Game Situations**

- **Giving Signals**
  - Make sure there is no confusion among the catcher, pitcher, and middle infielders.
  - Signs should be well hidden from opposing coaches and base runners.
  - Know all the signs from the manager and communicate them to the pitcher.
- **Bunts**
  - The catcher must call out bunt plays to let the defense know where to throw the ball. The catcher is the only player facing the play.
  - The offense is giving up an out. TAKE IT!
  - When fielding bunts, the catcher should get to the ball quickly and get rid of his mask.
  - When approaching the ball, the catcher should be under control with a wide base.

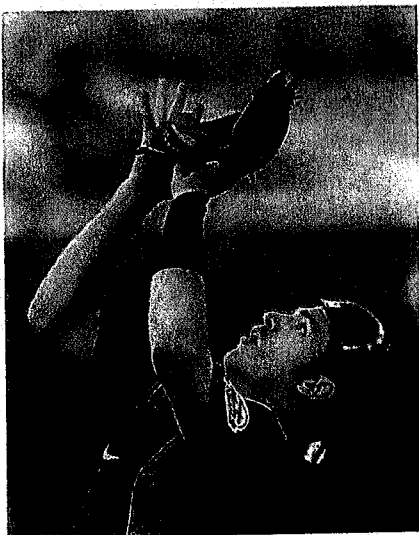


Mike Napoli of the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim gives signs to the pitcher. Note how his glove hand blocks the view of the third base coach.

- Whenever possible, the catcher should gather the ball with his chest over the ball.
- Use the glove when the ball is rolling.
- Use bare hand when the ball is stopped.
- **BALL DOWN 1<sup>st</sup> BASE LINE**
  - If the ball is being thrown to 1<sup>st</sup> base, the catcher should approach the ball from the left side of the ball.
  - Catcher should give himself a clear lane to throw when throwing to 1<sup>st</sup> base.
  - If the ball is being thrown to 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> base, then a direct line to the ball should be taken aggressively.
  - Be sure to get to the ball and keep momentum going to target.
  - Keeping a good arm angle (hand above elbow) creates more accurate throws.
- **BALL DOWN 3<sup>rd</sup> BASE LINE**
  - If the throw is being thrown to 1<sup>st</sup> base, the catcher generally should approach the ball from the right of the ball. The closer the ball is in line with the pitcher, the more we can circle the ball from the left.
  - Step past the ball with the right foot.
  - Reach for the ball with both glove and bare hands.
  - Get shoulders lined up with target for accuracy.

○ **Blocking the Plate/Tag Plays**

- The catcher's left toe should be pointed down the 3<sup>rd</sup> base line with heel placed on front, left corner in foul territory.
- Mask should be left on for protection.
- Catcher should be in a stable athletic stance.
- Catcher should try to catch the ball with two hands.
- Catcher should stay "at home" unless the throw takes him off line.
- Tag should be applied with both hands securing the ball.
- The path to the plate should be taken away with the shin guards first.
- Using the roll away technique will soften a collision. Stay soft with upper body.



Joe Mauer of the Minnesota Twins catches a pop-up. Note he has no mask and holds both hands above his head.

○ **Pop Ups**

- The catcher should go after every pop up. Do not rely on infielders to get everything.
- On pop ups in the general vicinity, the catcher should turn his back to the field and leave enough room for the ball to come back towards the field.
- On plays away from home plate, the catcher should leave his mask behind. On balls close to the plate, the mask should be thrown when the ball gets to its max height.
- Always try to catch the ball with two hands approximately head high.

- **Force Plays/Double Plays**
  - On force plays or the beginnings of double plays, the catcher should keep his legs in an athletic position and always expect an errant throw.
  - The catcher should keep his chest square to the throw he is receiving.
  - On force outs, the catcher should be on the edge of plate and act like a 1<sup>st</sup> baseman if necessary.
  - On double plays, the catcher should work his way into the throw and get his momentum moving towards 1<sup>st</sup> Base.
  
- **Pitch Outs**
  - **Right-Handed Hitter**
    - The catcher should set up straddling the outside corner of the plate.
    - Once the pitcher's arm starts moving toward the plate, the catcher is to start his footwork.
      - **SUGGESTED FOOTWORK:**
      - Step 1 is a lateral step with the right foot.
      - Step 2 is diagonal step with left foot towards second base.
      - Step 3 is a short step with the right foot to line up the throw to second base.
      - Step 4 completes the footwork with left foot stepping to the target to finish the throw.
    - Always expect a bad pitch.
    - If we have predicted a steal attempt correctly, make a good throw and get the out.

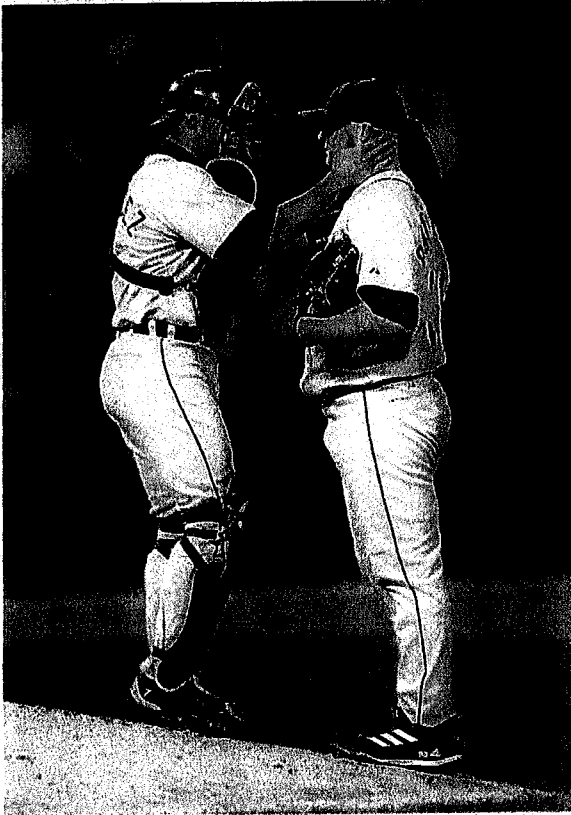


Javy Lopez of the Atlanta Braves executes a rundown.

- **Rundowns**
  - Always try to drive the runner back to 3<sup>rd</sup> base.
  - Run the runner back as hard as you can but always stay under control.
  - Make a good chest high throw. No pump fakes.
  - Do not leave Home Plate vacant.
  - When the only runner in a rundown is between 1<sup>st</sup> Base and 2<sup>nd</sup> Base, the catcher should work his way down to first base and relieve the pitcher in an extended rundown.

## *Mental Aspects of Catching*

As physically demanding as the catching position can be, it can be an equally challenging mental position. The mental aspects of catching, although often overlooked and underappreciated, graduate the physically gifted catchers into more well-rounded advanced catchers.

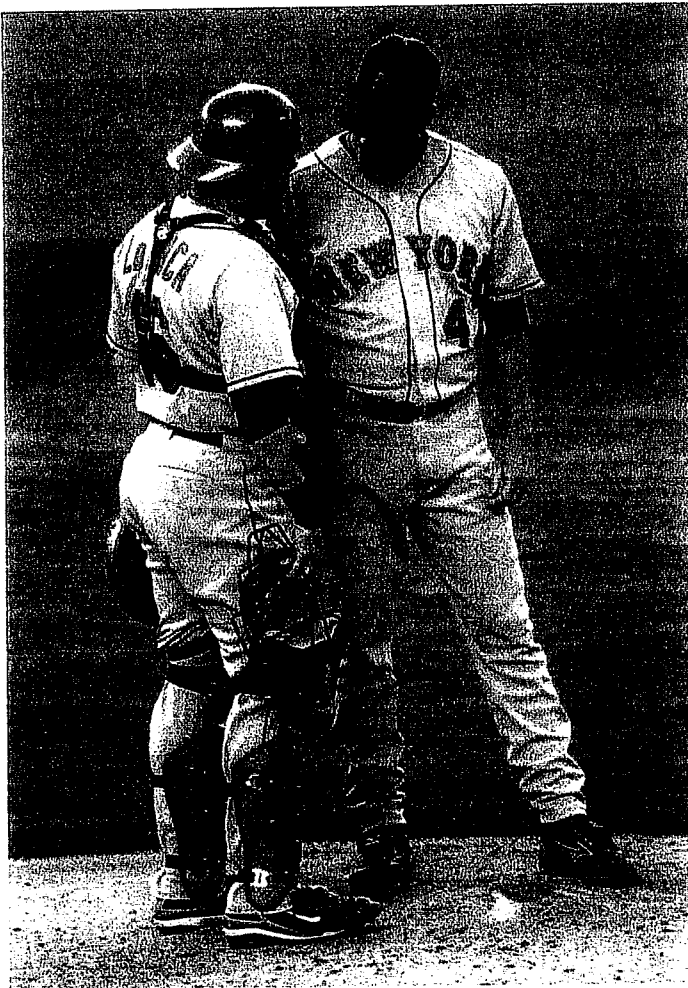


Ivan Rodriguez of the Detroit Tigers talks with his pitcher. A catcher should know how to communicate with each pitcher on the staff.

- **Leadership**
  - The catcher generally runs the game as the quarterback.
  - Confidence and hustle go a long way in setting a style for the way a team plays.
  - Every player on the field can see the catcher. The catcher should utilize this opportunity to lead by example. A positive demeanor influences a team positively.
  
- **Communication**
  - The catcher must know all the strengths and weaknesses of the entire pitching staff. Therefore, communicating with the pitching staff becomes paramount in establishing trust in each other.
  - The catcher must know the following about all of the pitchers on his team:
    - What is the pitcher's best pitch?
    - What kind of command does he have with each pitch?
    - How does his make-up affect his pitching?
    - How fast does he work?
    - Does he like mound visits?
    - Does he like to talk in between innings?
  
  - The catcher must be an extension of the manager on the field. Communicating with the manager and pitching coach about pitch strategies and/or situation in the game is vital.
  
- **Control the Tempo of the Game**

Establishing and maintaining a quality game tempo is largely the catcher's job. When the team is ahead, a quick tempo maintains momentum. Conversely, when the pitcher is struggling, the catcher can slow the game down to help the pitcher regain the composure and minimize the opponent's momentum
  
- **Calling a Game**
  - Have a plan and help lead the pitcher execute that plan.
  - In general, stick with a pitcher's strength over a hitter's weakness.
  - Concentrate on getting strike one on the hitter.
  - Pay close attention to the 1-1 pitch.

- Most times it is time for the best pitch in the best location.
  - Don't be afraid to double up.
  - Have a reason for every pitch called.
  - Take pride in calling a winning game.
- **Responsibility**
- It is the catcher's responsibility to:
    - Lead by example.
    - Carry a good demeanor.
    - Be prepared.
    - Control emotion.
    - Control the tempo of the game.
    - Control the running game.
    - Work harder than anyone else on the field.



Paul Lo Duca of the New York Mets talks to his pitcher during a game. A catcher must be an extension of the manager on the field.

- Know the pitching staff's strengths and weaknesses.
- Call a quality game by balancing the pitcher's strengths vs. the hitter's weaknesses.
- Never carry the burdens of at-bats to his defense.
- Remind the pitcher to cover 1<sup>st</sup> Base.
- Give all 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Defenses.
- Communicate where to throw the ball on bunt plays.
- Be a vocal reminder to infielders on pop ups.
- Remind the pitcher who is covering 2<sup>nd</sup> Base on a comebacker.
- Line up corner infielders on cutoff throws to home.
- Remind the pitcher to back up bases.
- Remind the infielders to knock the ball down with runners in scoring position.
- Remind the infielders to throw to first base on 3-2 count and 2 outs.
- Remind the infielders of the batter's speed and bunting ability.
- Remind the infielders of a possible delayed steal.
- Enjoy the demands of the position. Great demands produce great satisfaction.

## **What Managers Look For**

*Bob Didier – Arizona Diamondbacks*

### **1. Receiving**

- a. Target at bottom of strike zone
- b. 1 second freeze on low strike
- c. Don't jump up on strike three
- d. Two hands on "pitch out"
- e. Don't try to catch ball in dirt – BLOCK IT
- f. Good target – relax hands
- g. Take eyes to ball – ESPECIALLY INSIDE

### **2. Infield – Practice**

- a. Full gear
- b. Work on tag from outfield and infield throws
- c. Stay behind plate when throwing
- d. Look runner back on round of two's

**3. Starting Catcher** – *catch starting pitcher last five minutes before game*

**4. Tell pitcher to "Get Over"** on every left-handed hitter

**5. Throw to second between innings** – should be just like game

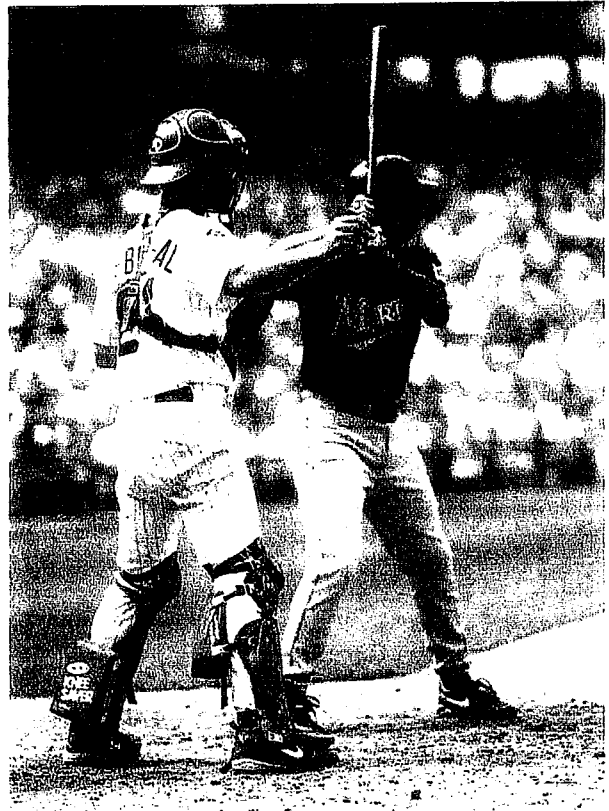


Garv Bennett of the St. Louis Cardinals.

## **Spring Training Drills**

*Bob Didier – Arizona Diamondbacks*

1. **Agility Drills – to quicken feet**
2. **Throwing long – 120 to 150 ft.; 5 or 6 bunts – ball by right foot**
3. **Throw on right knee**
4. **2 ball drill**
5. **Short hop drill**
6. **Blocking balls – no glove “Machine Gun Kelly”**
7. **Throws from outfield – use dummy!**
8. **Throw for time (2.0 average) – 1.8 Great!; 1.5 to 3<sup>rd</sup>; 1.6 to 1<sup>st</sup>**
9. **How to take infield**
10. **Pop flies – dive and slide**
11. **Double play – Home to 1<sup>st</sup>**
12. **Run down back to 3<sup>rd</sup>**
13. **Throw to 3<sup>rd</sup> – around Right-Handed Hitter**
14. **Pitch out and intentional walk**
15. **Catching clinic – sign – target - receiving**
16. **Bunts**
17. **Voice Command**
18. **Wild Pitch**



Mike Lieberthal of the Philadelphia Phillies sets up for an intentional walk.

**Calling A Game: Setting Up Hitters**  
**Catcher-Pitcher Relationship**  
**Signs From the Bench-Coach to Catcher**

*Bob Didier – Arizona Diamondbacks*

1. **Take Charge**  
*You are the quarterback – the team will play to your tempo*
2. **Handling Each Pitcher**  
*Know his best pitch: Double play pitch  
Strike out pitch*
3. **Be Positive in Advice**
4. **Know When to Give Into Pitcher's Choice of Pitch**  
*Call time in a big situation and talk*
5. **Show Interest in Pitch Selection: During and After the Game**  
*You should be able to go over every pitch to a hitter after an inning is over*
6. **Pitching Coach and Catcher Should Work Hand in Hand**
7. **Show Emotion When Pitcher Makes a Big Pitch**
8. **Pitch Selection**
  - A. *1<sup>st</sup> Pitch Strike*
  - B. *Change-up: How and When?*
  - C. *Inside Fastball*
  - D. *0-2 Count*
  - E. *Pitch Around Hot Hitters*
  - F. *Get Beat With Pitcher's Best Pitch*
9. **Learn Opposing Hitters**
10. **Coaches Signs To Catcher**



Jamie Burke of the Seattle Mariners congratulates his pitcher after a win.

## Turning Points of an At-Bat

*Bob Didier – Arizona Diamondbacks*

Below are six counts, the subsequent performance of hitters after both a ball and a strike, and the difference between the two.

Count		Performance of Hitters Reaching Count			
Before	After	AVG.	OBP.	SLG.	OPS.
0-0	1-0*	.282	.386	.463	.849
	0-1*	.241	.283	.375	.658
	Difference	.041	.103	.088	.191
1-0	2-0	.298	.499	.513	1.012
	1-1	.251	.321	.398	.719
	Difference	.047	.178	.115	.293
0-1	1-1	.251	.321	.398	.719
	0-2	.184	.215	.277	.492
	Difference	.067	.106	.121	.227
1-1	2-1	.268	.401	.441	.842
	1-2	.193	.243	.299	.542
	Difference	.075	.158	.142	.300
2-0	3-0	.302	.733	.535	1.268
	2-1	.268	.401	.440	.841
	Difference	.034	.332	.095	.427
2-1	3-1**	.287	.589	.500	1.089
	2-2**	.208	.305	.332	.637
	Difference	.069	.284	.168	.452

\* - Note that at-bats that begin with a ball result in hitters posting an .849 overall OPS, .191 higher than those that begin with a strike.

\*\* - The difference in OPS between hitters who reach 3-1 counts and those who reach 2-2 counts is .452.

## Pitcher's Advantage Over the Hitter

*Bob Didier – Arizona Diamondbacks*

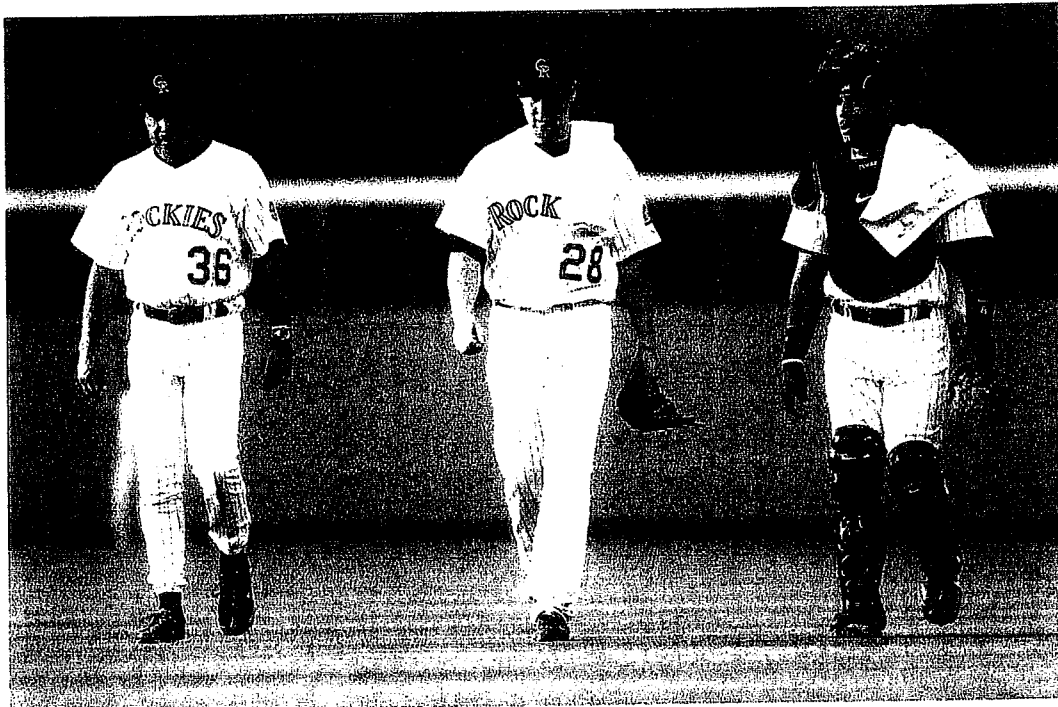
Unless a pitcher can throw his breaking pitches for strikes around 85% of the time he is cutting his own throat by throwing them much 2-1, 2-2, 3-0, 3-1, 3-2. A pitcher that throws breaking pitches on those counts is saying that he has to fool the hitter in order to get him out. This is giving the hitter way too much credit.

Every strike does not get hit, every ball hit is not a homerun, and if a hitter knows what pitch is coming, that still does not mean he will get a hit. If you find yourself always trying to fool the hitter you will find yourself walking a lot of hitters that you should not walk and 80% of them are going to score runs that should never be scored. The only way to become a great pitcher is to overcome the fear of having the ball get hit.

The great pitchers do not trick the hitters. When the count favors the hitter, the pitcher provides him with this opportunity to get himself out. He can increase his chances of getting the hitter out by changing speeds on the counts when the hitter is looking fastball. Watch hitters in batting practice. The hitter knows what pitch is coming, what speed, and, to what location. In this perfect hitting situation a hitter rarely hits over .350. How much harder is it to hit when the hitter does not know what pitch is coming, at what speed, or where it is coming to?

All the percentages in baseball favor the pitcher. It is the great pitchers who learn how to take advantage of this situation. That is what this type of pitch selection will do for you. Pitching is very easy; most pitchers make it way more difficult than it actually is.

- Keys:*
- 1. Put pressure on the hitter.*
  - 2. Make him hit the ball rather than walk him.*
  - 3. Don't give the hitter too much credit.*
  - 4. Use the counts.*



Yorvit Torrealba walks with the starting pitcher and pitching coach before a game. It is a catcher's job to make sure the pitcher knows the game plan.

## The Counts and What to Make of Them

*Bob Didier – Arizona Diamondbacks*

<b>First Pitch White</b>	Challenge the hitter. If you go 0-1 on a hitter he will hit around .240; if you miss and go 1-0 he will hit upwards of .390. Obviously, it is a big psychological/statistical edge to have on a hitter. If you throw a strike on the first pitch the hitter can take it for a strike or he can hit it. If he hits it there is an 87% chance that the ball will be caught. Don't give the hitter more credit than he deserves, pitch offensively, and challenge him.
<b>0-1 Black</b>	You are four pitches away from a walk and you can try to make a great pitch. Try to throw this pitch down, hard, and to the black. There is no need to give the hitter any pitch that he has a chance to hit hard. Start to bury the hitter on this count. Get it to 0-2.
<b>1-0 White</b>	It is a must to at least stay even with the hitter early in the count. This is a count to challenge the hitter and not a count to nibble or throw a low percentage strike pitch. Challenge the hitter, get a strike or an out on a hit ball. Remember, every strike does not get hit – you must throw a strike.
<b>1-1 Black</b>	You are back even with the hitter now and 3 balls away from a walk. Go ahead and try to make the great pitch on the black again. You are closer to a strike-out than a walk. Take advantage of the count. Throw something down on the black. Don't let the hitter escape these counts; put pressure on him. Let the count tell you when you can throw those great pitches that are unhittable on the black. If you miss, miss off the black down and it's no big deal. If you are trying to throw pitches down on the black you will find that when you miss you won't be missing belt high down the middle. Concentrate and you can get the pitch where you want it.
<b>0-2 Off the Black</b>	<p>If you don't concentrate here and know exactly what you are doing, you are going to get burned. The mistake most pitchers make on 0-2 is that they think this is the time to really hump up or really bust off the wicked curve. The problem with that is when you try to do these types of things you usually have less of an idea where exactly the ball is going. When you are this far ahead of the hitter you don't want to throw a pitch unless you are sure of where it is going. This is a count where you want to know exactly where it is going. Forget the middle of the plate. The hitter has to widen his strike zone a little so you just widen yours also. Your goal here is to make the batter swing at a pitch just out of the strike zone.</p> <p>*Throw it outside. If thrown inside the hitter will step into it. If thrown outside, there is greater room for mistakes.</p> <p>It doesn't matter what kind of pitch you throw as long as it is a pitch that you can get into a certain area just about all the time. Most hitters are just about convinced that they are out when the count is 0-2. Don't let this opportunity slip away, use it. Give the hitter a pitch that he can get himself out with.</p>

<b>1-2</b> Black	This is the only strike-out situation. Use this count and bury the hitter. Make this the last pitch you throw to this hitter. Make that your goal on this count. Throw something hard, down, on the black. Forget the middle of the plate and get all over the corners. The hitter knows he is in the hole and he is on the defensive. If he gets a pitch on the black and hits it he will not be able to hit it well. When you get to 1-2, throw him 1 more pitch, use the count.
<b>2-2</b> White	If a pitcher walks a lot of hitters he is usually making mistakes on this count. You do not want to get tricky or nibble on this count. Go back to putting pressure on the hitter. This is a great count to change speeds on. <i>Don't be looking for a strike-out on 2-2.</i> Throw a pitch that is a strike and get the groundball, fly ball out.
<b>2-0</b> White	This is another great count to change speeds. The hitter knows that you need to throw a strike but many of them think that you are obligated to throw them a normal fastball. They will usually swing at anything near the zone; make sure you get the pitch in the zone because you don't want to go to 3-0. Make it easy on yourself and very tough on the hitter, and take something off of the fastball that he is looking for.
<b>2-1</b> White	You are 2 pitches from a walk and 2 from a strike-out. This is not a count to get tricky on. Put pressure on the hitter and challenge him. This is another good time to change speeds but whatever you do, go right after the hitter.
<b>3-0</b> <b>3-1</b> <b>3-2</b> White	Over the course of a season 80% of all your walks will score. That is a lot of runs. One of your major goals should be to avoid walking hitters. Add to that the knowledge that over 85% of all balls hit are outs, then your goal should be to make the hitters hit the ball rather than walk them. That is the situation you are faced with on these counts. Don't try to fool hitters on these counts; put pressure on the hitter to hit the ball. 3-1 and 3-2 are great counts to change speeds on your fastball. No hitter is going to give up an at bat to look for an off-speed pitch on 3-2; the hitter is almost giving you an out on that count if you can take it. On these counts the hitter is thinking you have to throw him a fastball that he can hit hard – change speeds and get the pop up or ground out.