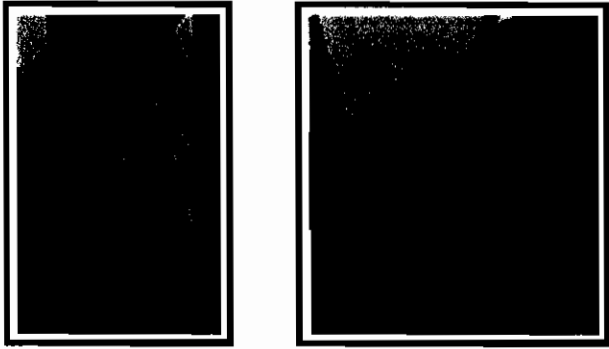


# Playing Catch - Throwing The Baseball - Page 1

## Entire Body

When kids are taught to throw, often the instruction is watered down into just a couple of steps. The act of throwing a baseball is not that simple. Throwing requires the entire body to work together in order to throw the ball accurately and to put something on it. All positions on the field require the ability to throw the ball accurately. Good throwing mechanics will enable you to make plays. When you warm up with the team before practice or play catch in the back yard, make sure you work on your mechanics and strive to improve your accuracy.

## Grip



The best way to grip the ball is across the seams as pictured to the right. The fingers are placed over the top of the seams to provide a good grip on the ball. In the first picture you'll notice that you can see 2 seams running horizontally. The back of the ball not visible will also have 2 seams running horizontally. By gripping the ball in this fashion, those 4 seams will help to keep the ball in the air longer and keep the ball traveling straighter (assuming the player can throw it with 12-6 rotation).

It takes years of practice to be able to grip the ball across the 4 seams in this fashion when playing a position other than pitcher on the field. Players can work on this by throwing the ball into their glove and as they pull the ball out shift the ball to the correct grip. This takes practice and I wouldn't worry about it for younger players.

Try to keep the ball out on the fingertips not back in your hand. The second picture on the right shows the ball out on the fingertips. Gripping the ball in the palm of your hand and not out on your fingers will cost you velocity and accuracy. Younger players may need to grip the ball with three fingers instead of two, but unless their hands are very small they should still try to grip the ball out on the fingers.

### Youth Coaching Advice

Young players will not be able to grip the ball across the seams while playing in the field. Work with your pitchers on getting the correct grip but have your other players work on other parts of their throwing mechanics. They can work on this skill when they get older. Do work with them on getting the ball out on the fingertips. This can be difficult with small hands, but it is still an important concept for them to understand.

Many young players don't use their wrist much when throwing the ball. When the ball is brought back in the throwing motion, the wrist should be cocked back. This way the wrist can be used as part of the throwing motion.

Watch young players throw and you will see most will throw with a stiff wrist. It is very difficult to throw the ball accurately with a stiff throwing wrist. This is a skill that young players should work on from the start.

You can practice this skill by holding your throwing arm just above the wrist with your glove hand (see image to the left). Bend your throwing arm at the elbow with your forearm vertical. Keeping your arm in this position, practice throwing the ball with just your wrist and fingers. It may feel strange at first, but keep working on this skill. The wrist and fingers play a major role in the accuracy and strength of your throw.

# Playing Catch - Catching The Baseball

## Be Prepared

When a thrown ball gets by you it's easy to look over to the other guy and place the blame on a bad throw. The problem isn't entirely in the throw. It also lies in your expectation that the ball will be thrown right at you. When playing catch during practice or receiving a throw during a game, expect that the ball won't be thrown to you. If you start with that expectation then you will see the throw that isn't right to you as an opportunity to make a good play.

## Position

When playing catch at the beginning of practice, use the time as an opportunity to practice not only throwing the baseball, but catching it as well. When waiting to receive the throw, start by putting yourself in an athletic position. It doesn't mean you have to be in the same ready position you would be when the ball crosses the plate, but you still want to have your knees slightly bent and your weight on the balls of your feet. Basically, you want to be ready to move.

## Go To The Ball

Instead of standing in one spot and sticking your glove out hoping (or not caring) if you catch it. Move into a position to give you the best opportunity to catch the ball. If it's thrown over your head take a drop step and go after it. If it's thrown a few feet to your side, move **and** try and get in front of it. Playing catch gives you an opportunity to practice fielding and catching the ball.

## Hands

Give the player your playing catch with a target to shoot for. Place both hands out in front of your chest prior to the player throwing the ball. This will give him an area to shoot for. If the ball is thrown above your waist you should catch the ball with your thumbs together, closing your bare hand over your glove as you make the catch. If the ball is thrown below your waist, catch the ball with your little fingers together and again close your bare hand over your glove as you make the catch.

## Have Fun

If all this sounds dry and boring then all you need to do is turn playing catch into a little competition to make things interesting.

Give targets for your partner and see how many times he can hit the glove without you having to move it. Have him do the same and see who can get to 5 or 10 first.

Alternate throwing groundballs to each other, the person receiving the throw will play first base. The first person to not field the ball cleanly or to pull the other person off the base with a bad throw loses.

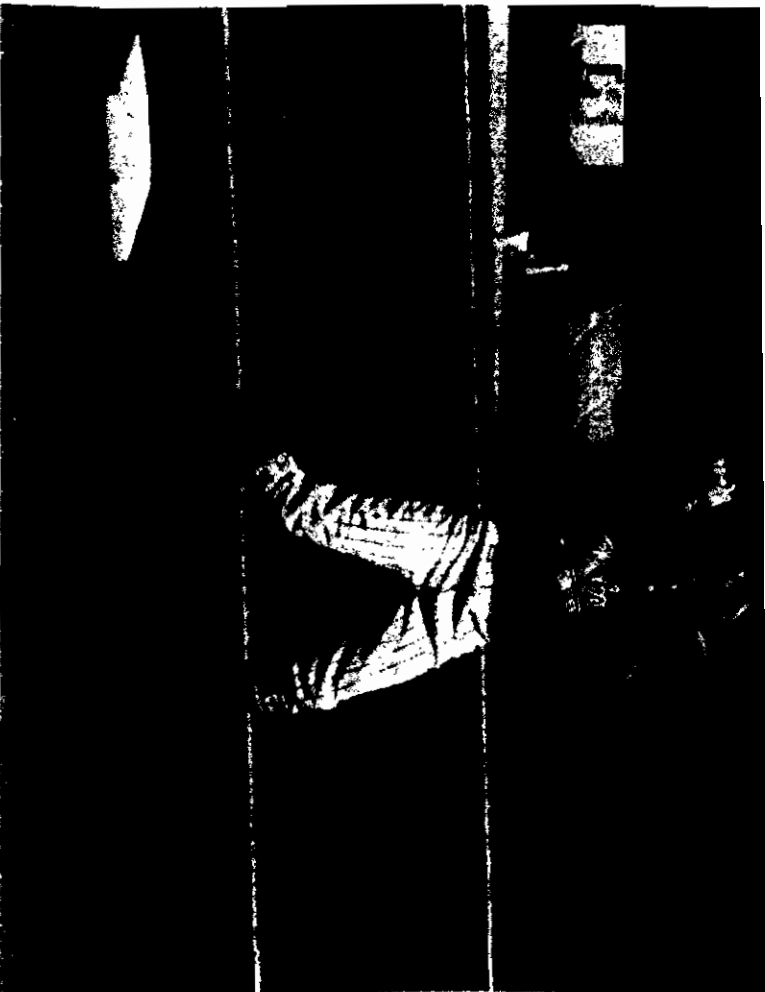
With younger players it can be fun counting how many throws can be made back and forth without the ball hitting the ground.

In the end baseball should be fun and there's no reason you can't have fun and work on becoming a better player at the same time. Playing catch is certainly one opportunity to accomplish both.

### Player Tip

You can set the tone for how your team approaches playing catch. If you make it a pre-practice activity for loosening up, then that will probably be the level of effort that you will get from your players.

Stretch as a team and play catch as a team. Have team throwing competitions and place emphasis on your team's ability to play catch. You will see the reward during your games.



## **K E Y P O I N T S**

1. Use a four-seam grip.
2. Take the ball down, out, and up out of the glove (circular motion).
3. Hand above the ball at first, shifting to behind the ball as release point approaches.
4. Elbow above the shoulder.
5. Point front shoulder toward target.
6. Step toward target.
7. Release ball.
8. Follow throw (or follow through).

## Fielding Ground Balls

### Ground Ball Hit At You



Matt's in perfect position to field a grounder

Unless the ball is absolutely ripped at you and you don't have time, get in the habit of moving toward the grounder as you prepare to field it. Notice the word 'charge' wasn't used -- that word implies running towards it as fast as you can. Unless it's a slow roller, you want to approach the ball in a controlled manner that is aggressive but not out of control. This allows you to make adjustments so you're not catching it off a short hop or taking it off the first bounce on the infield dirt. As you get closer to the ball, begin breaking down to get into position to field the ball. To do this, shorten your steps and widen your feet. Bend not only at the knees but also with your back. Put your hands out in front of your body and open your glove toward the ball with your bare hand on top.

### Catching The Ground Ball

There are a few common problems that players make when catching a ground ball.

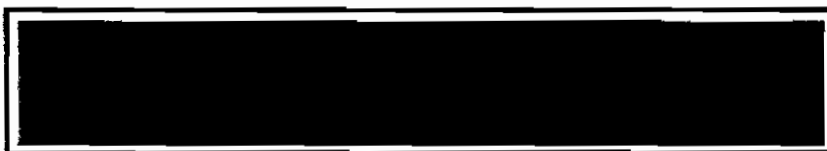
- Not catching the ball out in front.  
By doing this, you cannot watch the ball all the way into your glove; most likely you are bending either with your knees or back but not both.

When you catch the ball under you, you lose the ability to give with your hands. You want 'soft hands', a term used to describe a fielder who catches the ball out front of his body and seems to suck up the ball from that position into a position to throw. With soft hands, you can make last second adjustments to a bounce that was different than expected.

- Poorly Positioned Hands  
Your glove must be in a good position to field the ball: open and close to vertical. This gives you the most area to catch the ball.

### Short Hop

In all situations, try to avoid catching the ball on a short hop. In the diagram below, the approximate area of the short hop is shown in red. Catching the ball on a short hop is a difficult play to make. It takes practice for players to get in good position to avoid fielding a short hop. The following link is a good drill for players to work on the necessary footwork for avoiding a short hop: [Short Hop Drill](#)





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# The Coach's Box

**Volume 1, No. 2** **February 2006**

## Harold Reynolds' Tip of the Month: *Take the Ball to the Wall!*



The great thing about baseball is that no matter where you live – in the cold of Minnesota, or the heat of Arizona – you can still work on your game, without needing anyone else to help you out. Just play “wall ball.”

To play wall ball all you need is a glove and a ball. I used to play all the time when I was a kid. Here is how wall ball is played:

First, find an outdoor wall. Ideally, the wall should be at least 10 feet tall and five feet wide. It can be flat or have uneven parts. It can be a wall on a playground, or one side of your house, or your garage – as long as you have permission to use it.

The ball is also important. Use a tennis ball or a rubber ball of a similar size.

Once you have the ball and the wall, simply position yourself about 15-30 feet in front of the wall and begin to throw the ball off the wall. The ball will bounce back to you as if it were hit to you by a batter. You can repeat this as many times as you desire. Using an uneven wall gives the feel of bad hops, which will really challenge you.

I recommend a routine of fielding at least 100 balls off the wall each day: 25 coming straight to you; 25 that bounce off the wall and make you move to your left; 25 that make you go to your right; 25 that you have to backhand. In about 10 minutes, you'll have fielded a total of 100 ground balls and won't even need anybody to hit the ball to you.

As a Gold Glove infielder I made this part of my everyday routine while I was in the big leagues. It was a key to my success.

Remember, practice makes perfect.

### Harold

*Harold Reynolds is a former Major League All-Star and now ESPN Baseball Tonight analyst as well as the analyst for the Little League World Series. His instructional DVD series Harold Reynolds Presents Baseball is now available through Little League*