

BEHIND THE PLATE

with Patrick Jernigan



Making Pop Ups Look Easy

Have you ever been watching a baseball game when a routine pop-up is hit behind the catcher? You know for sure it is going to be an easy out; but then you notice the catcher. He's looking a little nervous, antsy even...and he is reaching out at the ball. He gets set up under the ball and then all of a sudden begins to back-pedal toward the infield. The ball falls behind him and the batter now has another chance to cash in and he usually does. If you watch a catcher who is experienced in catching pop-ups you might think there is nothing to it. You would be wrong. The only reason this play looks easy is because a good catcher knows a few secrets about pop-ups.

- Pop-ups generally travel over the catcher's shoulder on the opposite side as the batter.
- Pop-ups travel back toward the infield 5 to10 feet every time.
- Pop-ups that are dropped can kill the morale of the team.

Here is a breakdown of each step to take when preparing to catch a pop-up. Everything matters, whether it seems insignificant or not, so do it right and keep it in order. You will look calm and confident, and you will make the play.

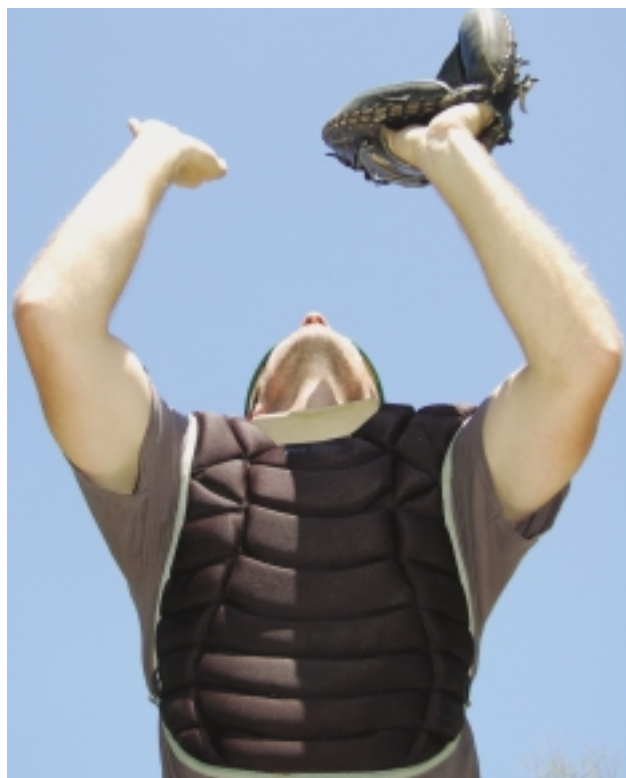


First, find the ball. Take your mask off, but leave it in your hand. You do not want to trip over your mask, so hold onto it until your feet are set up to make the catch.

This is not always the case, but usually if the batter is right handed, the ball will be popped over the catcher's right shoulder. If the batter is left handed, the ball will be popped over the catcher's left shoulder. By knowing this, you can be mentally prepared for which direction you will turn when coming out of your crouch.

Once you have found the ball, explode to it. Get to the ball just as quickly as you can so that you will have time to set up. Turn your back to the infield. Since there is so much backspin on the ball, the ball will travel back to the infield. Never give up on it. It may travel over the backstop, but it may still land in fair territory. So, keep the ball at least five to ten feet in front of you, depending on how high the ball is. Remember the catcher that started back pedaling and the ball landed behind him? I see it all the time. He did not keep the ball far enough out in front. Don't worry; the ball will come back to you.

Now you can throw your mask. Give it a strong toss so that there is no



chance of it getting in your way.

Stay relaxed. Do not fully extend your arms up. Place both hands up with your elbows comfortably bent. If you are on the first base side or the third base side, be vocal so you can call off the other fielder. Keep your knees bent, stay relaxed, and keep your concentration on the ball.

Once you have caught the ball with two hands, turn to the infield and look for an advancing runner.

The techniques for a pop up in front of the plate are exactly the same. Explode out from your crouch, get your back turned to the infield, and relax. You must really focus on keeping the ball out in front of you. If the third baseman or first baseman calls you off, let them have it. They are already in a good position to catch the ball.

Implement these techniques so you can execute this play every time.

For more information and tips, or to see this executed properly check out "Simplicity of Catching DVD". Log on to www.simplicityofcatching.com.

