



## BEHIND THE PLATE

with Patrick Jernigan

# BLOCKING CHECKPOINTS

One time in Little League, I remember letting a ball get past me in a game. When we got home, I didn't get ice cream and coke, I won a free training session with my dad, in my front yard, on blocking. Fast forward ten years.

While still in high school, I played in a tournament with a team from Valdosta, Georgia. The tournament was in Panama City, Florida. I had never played with this team. I think I struck out every at-bat in this tournament, but I blocked every ball, threw out every runner, and hustled everywhere I went. I finished that tournament

and came home thinking nothing of it. Well, come to find out, the coach of that team, Buddy Boyle (now the head softball coach for Shelton State Community College) later became the assistant baseball coach at Enterprise State Junior College. I got a call from him and he wanted to offer me a scholarship. Was this guy crazy? I struck out every at-bat, the only time he had ever seen me. He told me that he loved the way I caught, threw, blocked, and hustled. Which brings me back to that memorable Little League game. My dad knew that blocking was a critical skill needed to be a good catcher. At the time I thought it was crazy. Now I am so thankful that my dad saw the importance of blocking the proper way and how it can save a game. All the hard work paid off and got me to the next level, simply because I knew how to hustle and block a baseball.

The concept of blocking is easy, but the application is not always easy to perfect, even as high as the Major Leagues. Check out my web site - [www.simplicityofcatching.com](http://www.simplicityofcatching.com) and see what I mean.

In this article, I am going to work from the ground up and show you how to perform the perfect block.

First things first, read the ball in the dirt as early as possible. Bad things are bound to happen if you get down too late. The only way to get better at this is practicing like it is a game situation. Work on blocking



while catching pitchers in the bullpen. This is the best opportunity to work on blocking, yet most catchers find this time boring. This will allow you to practice reading the ball out of your pitcher's hand to see if it will be a ball in the dirt or a catchable ball.

To get down to the ball, kick your feet back, landing on your shoe laces and fall forward a few inches. Falling to your knees alone is too slow or kicking your feet back alone does not allow you to gain any ground toward the ball. Combining the two will put you on the ground quickly, shortening up the hop.

The glove should then be placed right between your knees. Push it down hard into the ground. Your knees should be just on either side of your glove, not too wide. Put your throwing hand behind your glove in the hole. Your palm should be open facing your glove. Last year a Major League catcher broke his hand by not getting his throwing hand fully behind his glove. Elbows should be pressed against the side of your body. If your elbows get out front too much, you will take a lot of balls off of your forearms instead of off that big, cushy chest protector.

Don't sit back on your feet. Lift your behind up a few inches off of your feet. This will give you a few inches on total height for a ball that bounces up too high.

Round your shoulders so that when a ball hits off of your chest, the ball will bounce back toward home plate. If you stick your chest out, the ball will bounce away from you off to the side. Work hard at your body positioning to get the ball to land on home plate.

Finally, keep your eyes on the ball. Follow the ball into your chest. Watch it bounce off. This will keep your throat safe. If you do not watch the ball, you might lift your head up, leaving your throat exposed to the ball. Trust me, the ball will find your throat if it is exposed.

For balls that are inside or outside, there is only one difference. You will lead with the feet, kicking around positioning your body facing home plate. This will allow the ball to bounce back to home plate.

Practice these techniques and you will master the art of blocking pitches in the dirt.

To see these and many other techniques correctly executed check out [www.simplicityofcatching.com](http://www.simplicityofcatching.com) where you can read blog posts, see pictures, and purchase the "The Simplicity of Catching" DVD. You can also find me working at Impact Zone in Lake City, FL if you want to stop in and say hi or ask questions!



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(2.5 miles from I-75 Exit 427)



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