



National Player & Coach Development Pathway

DEVELOPING SOX

Under 15, 6 x Week Catching Programme

Emphasis for all young catchers should focus on speed, agility and good mechanics.



Week #1

Catching instructor will need: home plates, softballs, bases, cones, pitchers, written checklist.

U15 catchers should bring their own gear and arrange their own competent pitcher each week. If you can't get a pitcher please let the instructor know early.

Start with:

1. Introduce players to 5 minute jog and choose 6 dynamic stretches for the players to do. Remember since we are catchers, we do all of this with our gear on! Add static arm stretches to finish off for 1-2 minutes.
2. Start with throwing progression for around 5-7 minutes slowly increasing the distance.
3. Take note of their throws and critique when necessary. How is their spin? Are they getting their body into the throw?

Around the World:

Note instead of using all 4 bases we will be using 3 - Home plate, 2nd, and 1st.

Catchers will throw the ball around the bases, aiming for the left knee target. Those receiving the ball will perform a tag as if they are receiving a ball at home plate and dropping down to block with their knee. Rotate around so everyone performs a long home-to-second base throw, along with switching the direction of the throws. Check their fitness by having players follow their throws for a portion of the drill.



This gives you time to identify some strengths and weaknesses.

- a. Take notes and tick off on your check list things each player needs to work on
- b. Are they relatively fit and agile or sluggish in their movements? Are they displaying quick transitions and quick feet? How accurate are the throws and tags? Are they communicating with each other?

Throwdown Check:

Set up to allow for each player to do 15 throwdowns - 5 to each base.

- c. Take notes and tick off on your check list things each player needs to work on

- d. Once everyone has completed their throws discuss and demonstrate some of the key points that can be improved.

Working with Pitchers:

Set each catcher up with their pitcher. Once pitchers are warm instruct catchers that they are to catch exactly as they would in a game. This includes blocking, framing, signals, etc.

Make sure to notify pitchers that every so often they are to purposely throw a dirt ball, allowing you to see how the catchers react.

Keep the catchers working with the pitchers until you have gauged what each players strengths and weaknesses are. Take notes and tick off on checklist.

Final Discussion:

Identify some key points that have been observed including what players do well at verses what they need to work on. Let them know what is ahead for next week and praise them for their efforts today.

U15 Week #1 Homework:



1. Give the catcher a copy of the checklist and let them tell you which ones they need to work on over the next week.
2. Ask them to throw 4 x during the week for approx. 20-30 minutes and to return to the next practice with the checklist.

Week #2

Catching instructor will need: home plates, softballs, bases, cones, 1 pitcher/helper, and written checklist.

Note as U15's, most players should already have some experience in terms of catching fundamentals and expectations. Hopefully most attended the U13 programme. However, the best way to ensure that these fundamentals become second nature is by repetition.

Start with:

- Warm up as per week #1 with a 5 min jog, 8 x dynamic exercises & quick feet core drills, overhand throwing and long toss that the player has worked up a sweat.
- Check their grip – on the seam?
- Check Pop time and quick feet with throws.
- Is their long toss flat or a rainbow throw?

Checklist:

- Ask the catcher to tell you which points on the checklist they have been working on during the last week.
- Tick off the checklist and see if the catcher has shown any improvement on the ones they did for homework.
- Praise them for their effort.

Key Point Discussion:

- Briefly discuss How to set up your feet and body in order to make a throw to first. Mention that great catchers are not lazy and will get up from behind home plate to make the play. Stay low!
- Free hand or use glove to field bunt?



Bunt Conditioning Drill:

- Split into two groups to work faster
- Have one line at first and one line squatting at home plate. Set up 10 bunts at random distances.
- Catcher is to start in a squat, then field one bunt at a time throwing to first. After each throw, they are to quickly sprint back and touch the cone behind the plate, then continue onto the next ball. The players at first base are to quickly throw the ball back to home (to a different player) for the tag play. Rotate so each catcher performs at each base.
- Tick off on your check list the items that need to be worked on. As they get tired are their feet still in proper position or are, they trying to just get through drill?

Pop Ups:

Get players into groups of two, working on catching pop ups with two hands at the eyes. Each player is to do 4 rounds- 2 sets without their mask on and 2 with their mask.

- After set players up at home plate, with the thrower in the umpire's position. Catchers will be in their squat ready for the pop up.
- After a few rounds with the players add some commands once the ball is caught to see if they are paying attention. (example "Go One, or Go Three")
- Discuss: Mask on or off? What do players prefer, what is faster?

Passed balls:

- Set up one line catching at home and the other just in front of the pitcher's mound. Roll a passed ball to the fence so the catcher can get it and make the play. Meanwhile the line near the pitcher mound will straddle home plate ready to make the tag at home. Repeat.
- Tick off on your check list items that need to be worked on.
- Is their body set up for the toss? Is the toss accurate at the knee? How are their tags?



Finish it off with Dives!

Get players used to putting their body on the line for those game winning catches. This can be done on grass for a softer surface.

Have players set up in their catching squat while somebody has the ball behind them. On command, the players will turn around and sprint while you toss a low ball right in front of them to dive and catch.

- How is the transition out of the squat?
- Do they put their body on the line?
- Eyes open?
- Full body extension?

If players are uncomfortable going straight into a dive, start them off on knees and extending outward into a dive. Then progress to a full dive standing up.

U15 Week #2 Homework:



1. Catch 4 x this week.
2. Take the checklist home and continue to work on the points that you do well and the ones you don't do so well.
3. Continue to work on your throwing transition, pop time and accuracy. How many times can you hit your target? Is your accuracy improving?

Week #3

Catching instructor will need: home plate, softballs, cones, and pitchers

Warm up same as previous weeks. Make sure legs are warmed up.

Blocking Fundamentals:

- Discuss with players the mechanics of a proper block.
- We want the catchers to keep ball in front, the object is not to “catch” the ball, but to keep it in front of you.

Have all players in a line in front of their home plate in.

Diagonal Blocking Race:

Stress importance of being quick and agile as a catcher. We want energetic catchers. Make sure we get the right angle to block.

- Set up 8 cones spread in two lines one foot apart in a “zig-zag” formation.
- Players are to work on their blocking angles and agility, starting in a squat and dropping their knees down at each cone as fast as they can. Since the cones are staggered, they need to make sure to get the appropriate angle which would keep the “ball” in front of them.
- Players will rotate to the end of the line. Do a few rounds until players look conditioned.



How many can you block?

- Get players into two or three groups with a pitcher.
- Using softballs, throw the ball simulating a dirt ball into the ground where it will bounce at the players chest protector.
- Get the players to drop down into the full block position; the goal is to keep the ball in front of you.
- Each player is to do at least 15-20 blocks in a row for 2-3 sets.
- Have each player keep count of how many they have blocked correctly in each round.

- Repeat 1 last round of 15, this time informing players they will not all be in the dirt. Some will be straight, and they will have to frame! Others will be high that they need to jump to! Count how many out of 10-15 they perform correctly.

Pitchers Warm up:

Each Catcher will quickly start warming up a pitcher until they are reasonably warm to start throwing spots/pitches.

Have catchers catch pitchers as they would in a game. Look at each player's framing and stance and write down what each player needs to improve on with the check list.

- Low to ground stance?
- Quiet hands or jabbing at the ball?
- Arm extended in centre of body at a distance where an umpire can see?
- Which way is palm facing on pitches?

Be sure to adjust players when necessary to make sure their form is correct.

Pitchers will hit the following spots for catchers to frame. Make sure catchers call pitches appropriately and set up late!

- Toss x15 inside
- x15 outside
- x15 high
- x15 low

Finish off with 10 x dirt balls for catchers to block!

Finishing Discussion:

Be sure to go over any areas regarding receiving the pitch, setup, framing, signalling, and blocking to help players and praise them for their efforts.

Blocking isn't easy but it's the difference between runners scoring or getting into scoring position!

U15 Week #3 Homework:



1. Perform some blocking drills 4 x this week. Either have someone toss some softballs to you in the dirt or work on how quickly you can drop to the ground in proper form (3-4 sets of 15)
2. Catch a pitcher 4 x this week for a half hour. Think about ways that you can help your pitcher during a game. What pitches should you call for them? What do you do if your pitcher begins to struggle?
3. Long toss 3-4 x in preparation for next week!

Week #4

Catching instructor will need: home plates, softballs, bases, cones, pitchers/baserunners, and written checklist.

Start with Same Routine as Previous Weeks:

1. Dynamic & Static Stretches
2. Throwing progression for around 5-7 minutes slowly increasing the distance.
3. Take note of their throws and critique when necessary. How is their spin? Are they getting their body into the throw? Do you see any improvements?

Dry Throw Break Downs:

Have players try both the quick pivot and the drop step and see which one works for each player. Having them all in a line in front of their plates, call out commands to make sure their form is correct. (Example "Set, turn, throw). You can also include framing commands and blocks to make sure they are switched on.

Brief Discussion:

- Positioning your body so the batter is not in the way of your throw.
- Any fundamentals that need to be brought up regarding pick offs and throw downs to second base.

1 & 3 Picks Drill:

- Have 1-2 pitchers throwing to the two catching positions, alternating. 1 helper will be catching at each of the opposing bases
- Players will make pickoff throws, rotating lines so they can work on both 1st and 3rd base throws.
- Take notes and go over check list with players as they are doing this.
- How is their pop time and accuracy?
- When a batter is in the batter's box, does it affect them and are they able to manoeuvre around the batter?

Throws to 2nd:

- Set up two throwing lanes so catchers can throw down to 2nd. Another option is to have one line of catchers at home plate while the other half are at first and they throw across field simultaneously.
- Have a helper pitch ball to catcher for the throw down.
- Be sure to talk with catchers throughout the process with any helpful hints.
- Take any notes on your check list.

Strategy Drill: Big Leads

- Discuss with catchers. What do you do if a player is taking a huge lead? Go through options.
- Set up with 2 catchers at first and second, a few catchers at home, and some helper baserunners. (Make sure all catchers rotate positions throughout drill).
- Instruct baserunners to their options:
 - 1) Big lead to return to base
 - 2) Big lead to delayed steal
 - 3) Straight steal
- Give each catcher 2-3 shots before rotating and perform several rounds.
- Take note of their mental awareness and physical stance. Are they ready for a play no matter what or are they in a lazy squat? Do they know what to do with the ball once it's pitched? Is there one particular play that the baserunner performs that they are making a mistake on?

Knee Throwing Introduction:

Make sure players know that this is not a requirement, just good to know how to do. Go over the fundamentals of a knee throw (see checklist)

- Get catchers in a line to perform some dry knee throws with commands. (Example “Set, turn, push” or “Ready, pivot, throw.”)
- Make sure players push out with their body and knee, get distance!
- Finish off with some practice knee throws to first.





U15 Week #4 Homework:



1. Work on your throws 4 x this week. Be sure to practice each throw we have discussed (Throws to second, 1st, 3rd, knee throws). How is your pop time? Are your throws accurate? Are you throwing using the strength of your whole body or just upper body? What type of spin does your throw have?
2. Work on your footwork for fielding bunts. Make sure you get low and your body is shifted in the correct position to make a quick and accurate throw.
3. Think about 1st & 3rd play situations. What are your options as a catcher? Who is your primary out? This will prepare you for next week.

Week #5

Make sure each catcher brings a pitcher or player (make sure you have at least 2 pitchers). Have all pitchers and catchers warm up, pitchers pitching and catchers focusing on fundamentals learned so far.

1st & 3rd Plays:

Brief Discussion: Discuss with players what your options are as a catcher. What is the best case scenario for a 1 & 3 play? The worse case? Who is our primary out? What is the goal of these plays? The best options vary from team to team based on your defence!

Set up an infield diamond with batters hitting and runners on base. Rotate catchers in and out. 1 & 3 situations to work on include:

- Throw down to 2nd base
- Cut off throw to 2nd baseman
- Pickoff to 3rd
- Pump fake to pickoff 3rd

Make sure players always keep eye on that runner at 3rd, and sell your throw! Whether you are throwing to the pitcher, the second baseman, or the shortstop who is at second base, your throw needs to be the same height!

Finish the Rest of Session with Game Situations:

- Bunt situations
- Runner on 3rd
- Runner on 2nd
- Bases loaded

Critique the Catcher on the Following Points:

1. How does the catcher cope with the set up rules of the game?
2. How is their setup? Are they too high? Do they look nervous or confident?
3. How is their framing?
4. What's their body language and communication like? Are they coming out to talk to the field and the pitcher? Can you hear them?
5. What's the catcher's attitude like? Confident or passive?
6. Are they backing up? If there is a play at 1st are they running to back up? Do they run to cover 3rd on a bunt?
7. Are they confident enough to throw a pick off?
8. Are they willing to put their body on the line, or do they look reserved? Are they willing to block or dive if given the opportunity? Are they keeping runners out of scoring position?
9. Do they consistently know where the play is?

Take notes for each player and at the end of your game discuss individually on things they did well along with things that could use some improvement. Discuss the importance of moving and backing up as a catcher, along with keeping the ball in front of you.



**U15 Week #5 Homework:**

1. Work with a pitcher 4 x this week
2. Each day work on throwing accuracy. How many out of 10 can you hit the target?
3. Frame 60 balls total - 15 x inside, 15 x outside, 15 x high, 15 x low
4. Block 45 balls - 15 x down middle, 15 x inside, 15 x outside. Make sure your angles are correct and eye is on ball!

Week #6

Putting it All Together and Communication

Catching instructor will need: home plates, softballs, pitcher/helper, and written checklist.

1. Warm up same as previous weeks

Communication Discussion

Who do catchers communicate with? Why? Positive reinforcement get the most out of your players!

- Coach
- Umpires
- Pitchers
- Players

Throughout this session, each player is to focus on their communication. Be loud, be confident, and be positive!

Hit the Target- Throw downs & Tags:

Set up 2 players at each base except third base. Pitcher will pitch to home where catcher will throwdown to second base. Second will tag and quickly throw to first who will do the same thing. First will then throw back to home to block and tag.

Players are to aim for the left knee, while those receiving will block and tag appropriately. Rotate players so everyone gets to throw from each base. How is their pop time & accuracy? Note the communication throughout the drill. Are they talking and calling for the ball?

Working with pitchers:

Briefly discuss the importance of getting to know your pitchers. What are their strengths, weaknesses, and how can you get the most out of them? How do you keep your pitcher in the game? A confident pitcher has a good catcher!

Set each pitcher up with 1-2 catchers. Each catcher is to do 10-15 blocks down the middle, to the left, and to the right. Make sure their technique is correct. Do 2 rounds of this.

Go into full pitching and take note of setup and framing technique. Throughout this round have the pitchers rotate every so often so the catchers can adjust to different pitchers. Make sure you walk around and discuss with each catcher what their pitcher's strengths are and how they can use them.

Are catchers blocking if/when necessary?

How is their communication? Are they talking to the pitcher or just sitting back? Can they tell what their pitchers go-to pitches are?

Give the catcher an overall summary of their 6 week experience:

1. Tick off the game critiquing questions which you can write on the back of the checklist.
2. Go over the checklists with players.
3. Check that they have an understanding of what is required as a catcher and identify some of the strengths of each of them.
4. Mention thinking about pitch calling and sequences for their next clinic!
5. Praise the catcher for their effort over the last 6 weeks!



Dynamic Stretches

Dynamic stretching is good for waking up muscles, to get them ready to work hard. This involves moving your limbs through the full range of motion that they will be used in during activity.

Effective Dynamic Stretching

- Always do 5-10 minutes of aerobic exercise before starting dynamic stretching
- Maintain tension in the lower abdominals to protect your lower back and to control movement of your trunk
- Keep your knees in line with your toes to protect your knees
- Do not force the movement or lose control of the movement

Gradually increase the range of the movement over a series of repetitions as you loosen up.

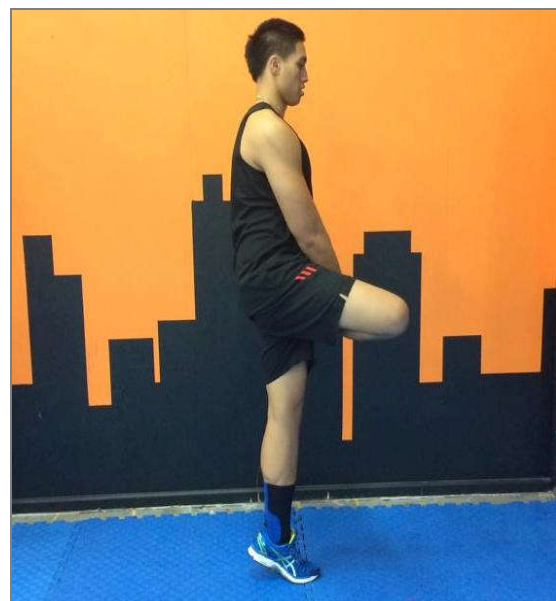
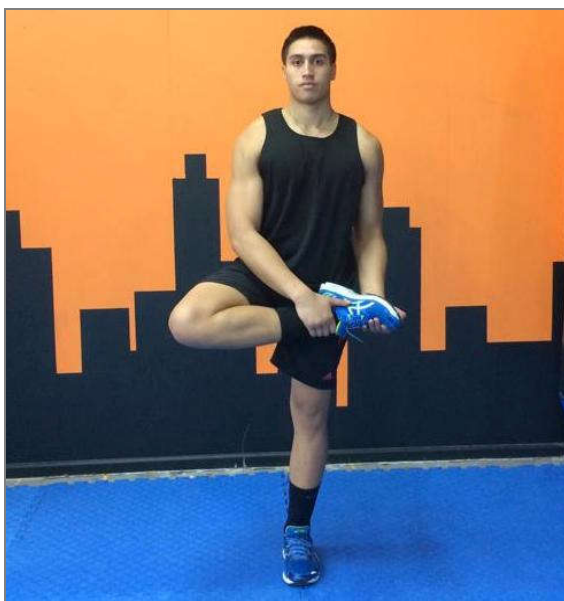
You can add these exercises in your warmup too if you choose – Jog, high knees, butt kicks, side steps stretching arms out, backward jog, straight leg kick, high skips, etc

Make sure you don't over stretch, listen to your body and know your limits.

1. Figure four

Lift one foot towards the other thigh. Grasp ankle and heel and pull up at the same time as tippee toe. A few steps in between. Back straight, head and chest up.

Target: Glutes and legs.



2. Tin soldiers

Stand on the balls of feet, kick one foot forward and touch toes with opposite hand. Alternate as you move forward.

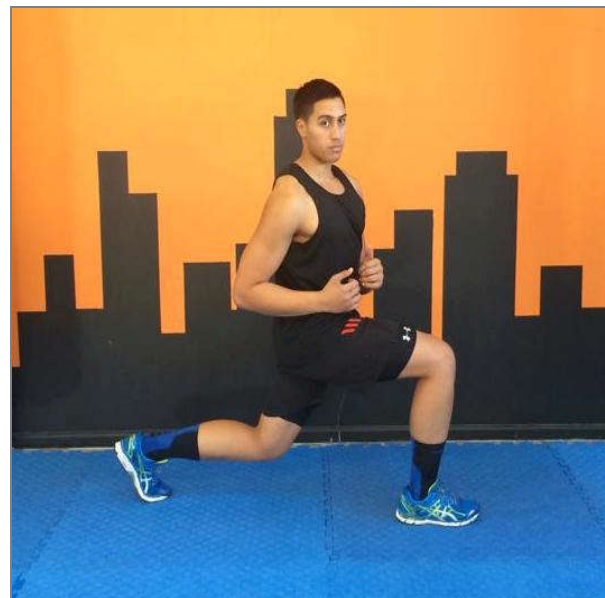
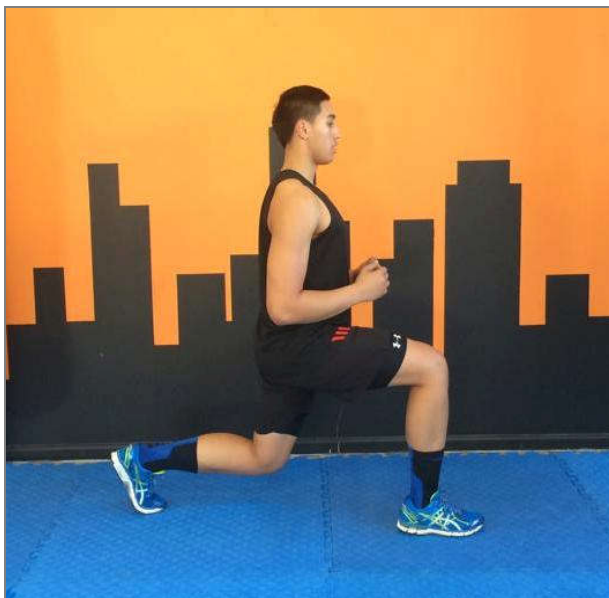
Target – Glutes and hamstrings.



3. Lunge twist

Walking forward lunge, knee behind toes, then twist torso away from extended leg then the other way. Make sure we have control of balance and core.

Target – hip flexors, core and back.



4. Knee hug

Pulling your knee into your chest at the same time as tippee toe. A few steps in between.

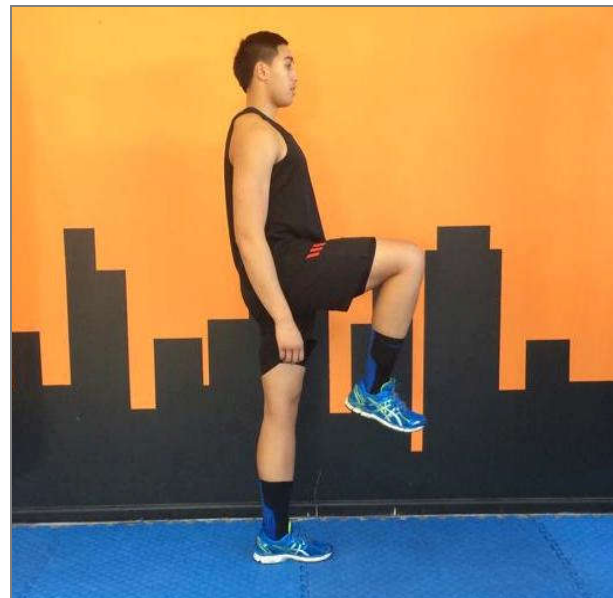
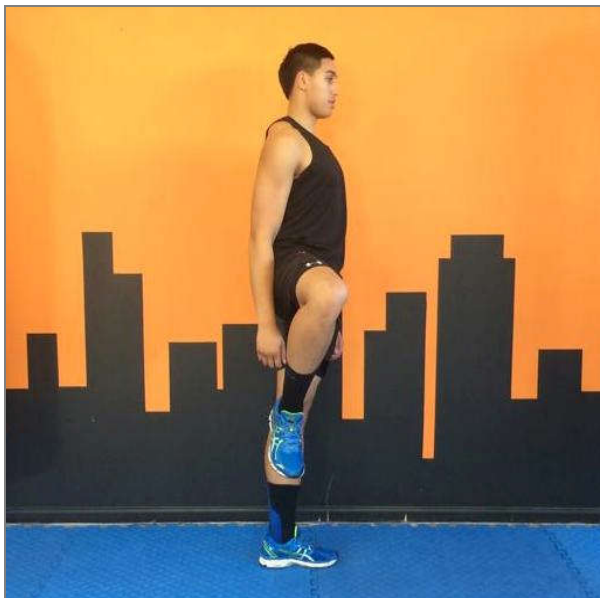
Target - Glutes.



5. Hip flexor

Walking forwards rotate you hips from outer to in, with a few steps in between. Also do it backwards, in to out.

Target – Hip flexors.



6. Hand walk

Fold forwards and walk your hands out. Then bring your feet up to follow.

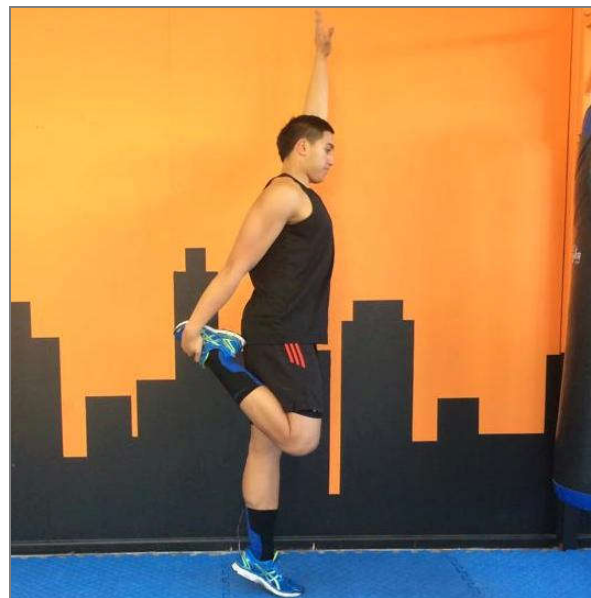
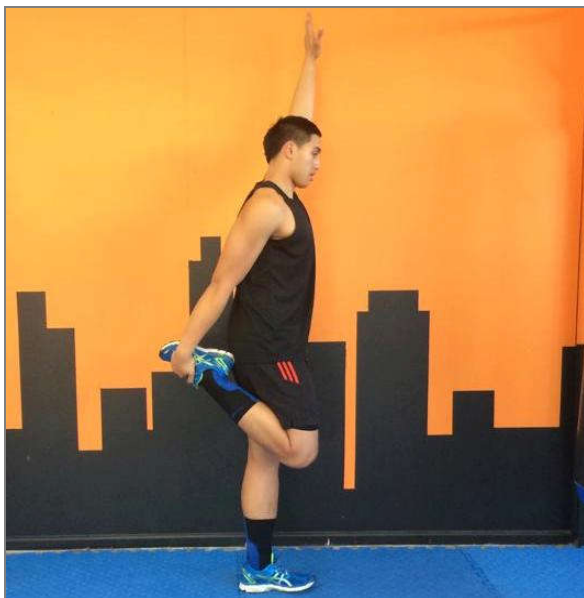
Target - Hamstrings and back.



7. Quad Stretch

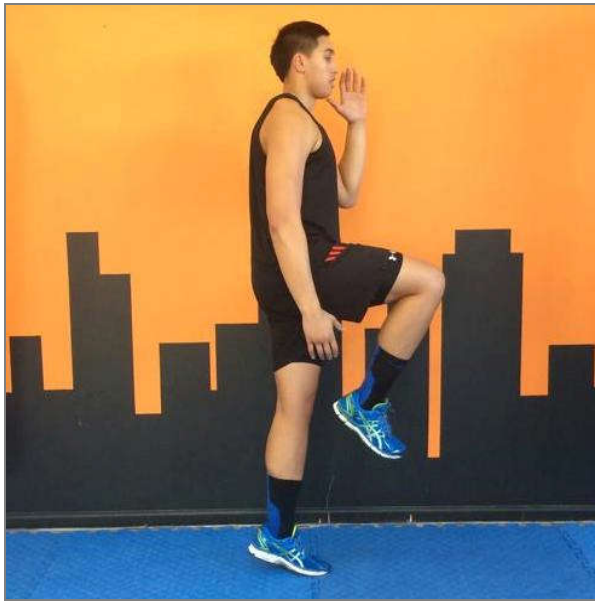
Hold foot up behind butt and reach to the sky with the other hand and tip toe. Few steps between.

Target – Quads and calves.



8. Hip Skips

Drive arms with high knees with skip.



Quick Feet/Core Dynamic Drills

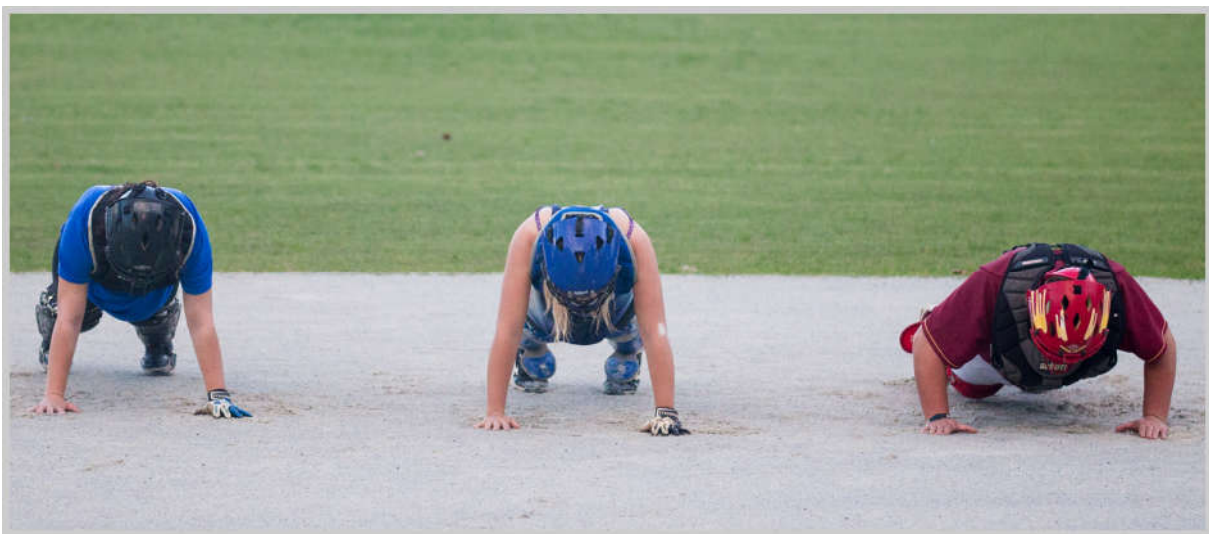
Quick Feet + Explosive Jump

Have your legs shoulder width apart and on the balls of your feet, alternating each foot tapping on the ground as fast as you can. When signalled, drop down into a squat and touch the ground then explode up as high as you can with a full body extension. Repeat for a certain amount of time.



Quick Feet + Burpee

Have your legs shoulder width apart and on the balls of your feet, alternating each foot tapping on the ground as fast as you can. When signalled, drop down into a squat, then kick your legs back enabling you to be in a plank position. Then kick legs back inward to the squat and finally explode up as high as you can with a full body extension. Repeat for a certain amount of time.



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