



## National Player & Coach Development Pathway

# DEVELOPING SOX

Under 18, 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.

U18 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.

### Warm-Up:

- Jog, skip and jump for 5 minutes (Build Up Sweat)
- Routines over 20 metres. Incorporate Dynamic Stretches x 8; please refer to the back of the document.
- Have a set of dynamic stretches available for players to choose from each work-out and be sure to include quick feet/core drills at the end.
- Finish with static arm stretches to finish off for 1-2 minutes

### Start with:

1. Start with throwing progression for around 5-7 minutes slowly increasing the distance.
2. Take note of their throws and make sure everyone understands/displays proper throwing mechanics.

### Blocking Race:

Set up 8 cones in a hexagon and have players race each other displaying proper blocking technique at each cone. This focuses on conditioning, speed/agility, and technique. Be sure to switch directions every so often. Tick off any boxes necessary on your check list with the players.

- 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 lethargic in their movements? Are they displaying quick transitions and quick feet?

### Keep it in Front Drill

Get into 2 or 3 groups with 1 pitcher. Go through the entire bucket of balls, throwing them hard in the dirt quickly rotating one catcher at a time. Every so often make sure the pitcher throws a high ball in there so they can jump up to catch it.

- a. Take notes and tick off on your check list things each player needs to work on
- b. How are their blocking fundamentals? Are they exploding up in the air to get the high ball?

- c. Do a few rounds to test the players' athleticism and to see what they need to work on.

### Throwdown Check:

Set up to allow for each player to do 20 throwdowns - 5 to each base and 5 knee throws.

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

1. Pitchers quickly warm up each pitch, so they are able to throw all to signals and counts.
2. Catchers are to catch exactly as they would in a game with a count. 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.

- a) Catching fundamentals - do they block and keep ball in front when necessary or just jab at ball? Do they set up late or early? How is framing, are they setting up late, etc.
- b) Mental Game/Calling - Are they utilising pitchers' strengths to get ahead of count? When behind in count, do they shift to go-to pitch? When ahead of the count, do they try to throw junk? Are they mixing or getting into a recognisable rhythm? How do the pitchers feel throwing to them?

### Finishing Discussion:

Discuss with players how they were calling the pitching sequences. What are some of the things that determine what pitches you call as a catcher? Bring up any key points regarding catching fundamentals that you feel they still need to work on.



### U18 Week #1 Homework:

1. Catch 4 days out of 7 including games
2. Perform Catching drills for 20 min each practice
  - Blocking - dry blocks & have someone throw balls to you to block
  - Framing - wall sit frames
3. Work on some key fundamentals pointed out on your checklist regarding throwing to each base
  - How many throws out of 10 are accurate to each base?

## Week #2

### Warm-Up:

- Jog, skip and jump for 5 minutes (Build Up Sweat)
- Routines over 20 metres. Incorporate Dynamic Stretches x 8; please refer to the back of the document.
- Have a set of stretches available for players to choose from each work-out and finish off with quick feet/core drills.
- Perform static arm stretches to finish off for 1-2 minutes.

### Warm Arms:

- Throw for 5-7 minutes slowly increasing the distance.
- Focus on a quick transfer glove to ear, as if you were catching in a game.
- Finish off with 1-2 minutes of Long toss (see back of booklet for instructions) and working on your backspin.

### Bunt Conditioning:

Set up with a catcher at home, second base, and first base with the rest in those lines as backup. Instructor/helper will be in the home plate umpire's position with a bucket of balls.

- Catchers will work on bunt defence, assuming there's a runner on first base.
- Play the LEAD runner.
- Players receiving at second are to give a good target, and then fire to first as if it's a tag play (left knee).
- Players at first are tagging as if someone will slide into them, then throw back home.
- Everybody is to rotate lines that way conditioning is added into the drill.

### Game Changing Dives and Pop-ups:

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?

Put a bit of conditioning into it by making each player receive 3-4 dives or pop ups around the diamond so they are transitioning from a dive on the ground up (similar to a burpee) to receive a pop up. Rotate lines.

- Make sure they catch pop-ups with two hands just above the eyes.
- If around fence, do they stick hand out to see how close they are?

### Calling the game (Indoor session Part 1):

After some conditioning and fielding drills, shift indoors to have a mental game session. Bring a plate and a bat in order to show examples of hitting characteristics. Pictures are ideal as well to demonstrate different hitting characteristics. Refer to the "Calling the Game" handout and discuss with players the characteristics of hitters that they need to identify along with weaknesses and ideal pitches to call based on the weakness. Be sure to create interactive discussion instead of a lecture. We want the players to work through to the solutions.

- What are some things they need to know in order to call a game?
  - Strengths/weaknesses of pitcher
  - Hitting Characteristics
  - Defensive strengths/weaknesses
  - Game Situations
  - Umpire's Zone
  - Sequences
- What characteristics do they notice in batters and what pitches do they call?
  - Go through "Calling the game" handout discussing points as they come up.
  - What are the strengths of these characteristics? Weaknesses? What pitch should you throw?

Note you will have less than 45 minutes for discussion. You will probably get through around half of the characteristics in your discussion. Continue the second half in the following week.



### U18 Catching Week #2 Homework:

1. Catch 4 days out of 7 and this includes games
2. Perform Catching drills for 20 min each practice
  - Long Toss - focus on back spin and really use your body to achieve distance
  - Framing - Have someone pitch so you can frame 80+ pitches. Work on your form for high, low, in, and out pitches
3. Think about pitching sequences you have called in the past. What pitch sequences were successful and why were they successful? What pitch sequence was unsuccessful and why? Write down so you can identify one of each at next practice.

## Week #3

### Warm-Up:

- Jog, skip and jump for 5 minutes (Build Up Sweat)
- Routines over 20 metres. Incorporate Dynamic Stretches x 8; please refer to the back of the document.
- Have a set of stretches available for players to choose from each work-out and end those with quick feet/core drills
- Finish with static arm stretches to finish off for 1-2 minutes

### Warm Arms:

- Throw for 5-7 minutes slowly increasing the distance
- Focus on a quick transfer glove to ear, as if you were catching in a game
- Finish off with 1-2 minutes of Long toss and working on your backspin

### Wall Sit Framing:

Perform 3-4 rounds of this and see how long your players can go! This can be done either indoors in smaller areas or outdoor. As players are performing their wall-sit, have someone toss a ball to them alternating inside, outside, high, and low pitches. This can be done without a glove or with a glove. Make sure they are displaying proper mechanics (palm to plate, arm extension, etc.) and assist players where necessary. Tick off the necessary items on your checklists.

### Walk through blocks & Frames:

Get players into lines and in the squat position where they will react based on verbal commands for a timed period. Perform 2-3 sets. Once each action is complete, they are to get straight back into their squat position ready for the next one. Make sure they are moving and setting up correctly, their framework is accurate, and they are exploding up or down off of their legs depending on the command. Depending on the catchers, you can speed up or slow down commands as necessary or alter the timeframe of the exercise.

### Commands:

- Ready (initial setup behind middle of plate)
- Right/Left (shifting body to pitch location, setting up to receive ball)

- Frame (Make sure arm is firm and extended with palm to plate technique)
- Down (quick block with proper fundamentals)
- Up (explode up in air to catch high wild pitch)



### 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 3 sets.
- Be sure to make the catchers work by alternating directions - throw some inside, some outside, and some down the middle.
- 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.

### Calling the game (Indoor session Part 2):

After some conditioning and fielding drills, shift indoors to finish off a mental game session. Bring a plate and a bat in order to show examples of hitting characteristics. Pictures are ideal as well to demonstrate different hitting characteristics. Refer to the “Calling the Game” handout and discuss with players the remaining characteristics of hitters that they need to identify along with weaknesses and ideal pitches to call based on the weakness. Finish off with what to call based on game situations. Be sure to create interactive discussion instead of a lecture. We want the players to work through to the solutions.

- What characteristics do they notice in batters and what pitches do they call?
  - Have each player discuss a successful or unsuccessful pitch sequence that they called (this was last week’s homework)
  - Go through “Calling the game” handout discussing points as they come up, finishing off hitting characteristics and going into appearance/game situations
  - What do you call based on the batter’s appearance (weak batter vs strong batter, relaxed batter vs tense batter, aggressive batter vs passive batter)?
  - Game situations with runners on (white board session beneficial)

Note you will have less than 45 minutes for discussion. Give each player the “Calling the game” handout to look over for homework.



### U18 Catching Week #3 Homework:

1. Catch 4 days out of 7 and this includes games
2. Perform Catching drills for 20 min each practice
  - Long Toss- focus on back spin and really use your body to achieve distance
  - Throwdowns - hit your target x 10 each base. How many are accurate out of 10? Do one last round of 5 to each base focusing on pop time.
3. Go over Calling the game handout and make sure you are familiar with the guidelines for each characteristic.

## Week #4

### Working with pitchers in game situations:

Catching instructor will need: home plates, softballs, catcher's written checklist, pitchers. Try to get a few additional players (preferably hitters) who can jump into the field, bat, and base run.

1. Warm up same as previous weeks

### 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 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> base throws.
- Take notes and go over check list with players as they are doing this.
- How is their pop time and accuracy?





### Calling the Game Situations with Pitchers - Part 1:

Have the pitchers quickly warm up so we can get into game situations. The main focus for today's session is the pitch sequences and calling the game based on the situation. Be sure to rotate the pitchers and catchers often so everyone has a go at every situation.

- No runners on- focus on sequence for leadoff batter
- Runner on 1<sup>st</sup>- 0 outs
- Runner on 2<sup>nd</sup>- 0/1 out
- Runner on 3<sup>rd</sup>- 0/1 out
- Bases loaded

Rotate pitchers and catchers every so often so everyone has opportunities. Make sure you walk around and discuss with the catchers about the sequences they were calling. Did they adjust to the pitcher's strengths? Did they call based on the game situation? What did they notice based on the batter's stance/swing? If something went wrong, did they display mental toughness by adjusting or did they get nervous?

Take notes when necessary regarding the players and be sure they are displaying proper catching form (blocking, framing, being alert & explosive, etc)

How is their communication? Are they talking to the pitcher or just sitting back?

### Ending Discussion:

Go over any key points that you noticed throughout day and see how the players felt. Were there any situations that they felt uncomfortable such as when runners were on third? Which scenarios/situations do they feel more confident and why? Mention that the catcher is the brains of the field at all times and it's important to stay calm and focused no matter what the pressure or situation. Everyone on the field stares at the catcher, so in return display confidence and leadership for your team.



### U18 Catching Week #4 Homework:

1. Catch 4 days out of 7 and this includes games.
2. Perform Catching drills for 20 min each practice
  - Long Toss- focus on back spin and really use your body to achieve distance.
  - Bunt Defence- Practice your footwork and quickness to properly field a bunt. Make sure your feet are lined up and your throw is accurate.
  - Passed ball flicks- work on forehand and backhand flicks to home plate. Hit your low target at the knee.
3. Attend a premier softball game to analyse the catcher's pitch calls. If there are no games, then pull up a softball game on Youtube.
  - Think about what the catcher is calling based on the situation and the batter's characteristics. Do you agree with what they are calling, or would you call something else? Can you tell what the pitcher's Go-To pitches are based on the calls?

## Week #5

### Working with Pitchers in Game Situations - Part 2:

Catching instructor will need: home plates, softballs, catcher's written checklist, pitchers. Try to get a few additional players (preferably hitters) who can jump into the field, bat, and base run.

Warm up same as previous week:

#### Passed Balls:

Get players into 2 groups to perform this drill. 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's mound will straddle home plate ready to make the tag at home. Repeat.

Tick off on your check list any items that need to be worked on. Is their body set up for the toss? Is the toss accurate at the knee? Are they low to the ground for their tags and dropping their knee to block?

### Calling the Game Situations with Pitchers - Part 2:

Have the pitchers quickly warm up so we can get into game situations. Last weeks focus was based on the situation. This week we will focus slapper situations and what to throw to certain batters. Be sure to rotate the pitchers and catchers often so everyone has a go at every situation. What we also want is for each catcher to have some turns to bat so they can identify what other teams would pitch to them.

- What do other catchers call when you are up to bat?
- Runners on 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>- 0/1 out
- Runners on 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup>- 0/1 out
- Nobody on base, focus on batter
- LH slapper situations

Rotate pitchers and catchers every so often so everyone has opportunities. Make sure you walk around and discuss with the catchers about the sequences they were calling. When catchers had their opportunity to bat, what sequences were called on them? Do they agree/disagree with what was called? What can this tell them about how they bat and can they identify what other teams would call against them in the future?

Take notes when necessary regarding the players and be sure they are displaying proper catching form (blocking, framing, being alert & explosive, etc)

How is their communication? Are they talking to the pitcher or just sitting back?

### Ending Discussion:

How did everyone feel regarding lefty slapper situations? What did they focus their calling sequences on? When the tables turned and catchers went up to bat, what did you think about what was being called against you? Why do you think catchers are normally great batters? What does this do for their own hitting technique and what can they identify to help them against opposing teams?



### U18 Catching Week #5 Homework:

1. Catch 4 days out of 7 and this includes games
2. Perform Catching drills for 20 min each practice
  - Long Toss- focus on back spin and really use your body to achieve distance
  - Work with a pitcher and have them work on your framing, blocking, and receiving wild high pitches.
  - Perform 5 throws/pickoffs to each base and record how many were accurate.
3. Think about your current team and analyze them. If you were an opposing catcher, what are your team's strengths and weaknesses? What would you call if you were to be facing your current team's batters? What would you call if you were facing yourself as a hitter?

## Week #5

### Putting it All Together (90 min sessions):

Catching instructor will need: home plates, softballs, catcher's written checklist, pitchers.

Warm up same as previous weeks

### Mental Game & Discussion:

Discuss this week's homework. Did they notice any strengths/weaknesses of their own team on defence and offense as batters? How will knowing these help you in the future?

What are ways that we can improve our communication to get the most out of our team and pitcher? Throughout this session focus on communication. Be loud, confident, and positive.

### Bunt Defence around the World:

Set up 2 catchers at each base. The catcher at home will start off fielding a bunt and throwing to first, displaying proper fundamentals and quick feet. From first base the catcher will throw long to 3rd for a tag at the left knee and then throw a tag to second base. From second the ball will get thrown back to home and repeat process while players rotate lines.

Focus on basic fundamentals:

- Communication
- Accurate throw
- Quick transfer/pop time
- Quick feet
- Drop down on knee for tag

Take notes when necessary regarding the players and write final comments on checklists.

### Reaction Drills:

Get players into groups with a pitcher. In a rapid fire motion and going through the bucket of balls, alternate throws to the catcher so they have to react to what is given;

- Dirt ball
- High wild pitch
- Accurate pitch to frame

Do this quickly so conditioning is implemented along with proper form. Rotate catchers and perform 4 rounds.

### Pickoffs and Throwdowns:

Have each player throw 10 to each base simulating a pick off or a steal. Be sure to include a batter in the batter's box. How many out of 10 do they get at each base? Include 5 knee throws to finish off.

Look through checklist to see if there have been any improvements in terms of technique, accuracy, pop time, etc. Is there a difference compared to week 1?

### Finish off with the Pitchers:

Warm up your pitcher and then go straight into game calling. We will go through 12 batters and give scenarios similar to a line up and those hitter characteristics (i.e. lefty leadoff batter, 2nd batter bunter, 3rd contact hitter, 4 power hitters, etc.)

Walk around and discuss with catchers what they would call based on these batters.

### Ending Discussion:

Go through player checklists with everyone and discuss what they learned throughout the clinic. Do they feel more comfortable with mental game strategy and calling? Do they have a better understanding of how they can utilise their team/pitcher's strengths to help the team be successful?

Praise them for their efforts! Great Job!

## Catcher's Conditioning Drills

### Long Toss:

Every catcher will be different; there are many variables in order to increase velocity. Each player is limited by their genetics, how hard they have worked in the past leading up to the point where they start this program. The age they start will determine how much of an increase you will see—catchers will gain velocity and distance as they grow.

Remember not to compromise form; focus on mechanics which allows an increase in velocity while avoiding injury. Focusing on backspin and finishing down with the body through the throw will increase velocity and distance.

Distances will vary per child. Don't let players get discouraged if they are having trouble with one of the longer distances. Shorten the distance for them if this is the case.

Setup cones for each approximate distance. Pair catchers that have comparable arm strength.

#### 1. Throwing on an Arc (Separation Increases)

- 22 Meters (3 Minutes)
- 45 Meters (3 Minutes)
- 70 Meters (3 Minutes)
- 90 Meters or longest possible distance (2 Minutes)

#### 2. Throwing on a Line (Separation Decreases)

- 70 Meters (2 Minutes)
- 45 Meters (2 Minutes)
- 22 Meters (5 Minutes)

Using a home plate give a target with your glove

- 3 x Left Hip
- 3 x Right Hip
- 3 x Left Knee
- 3 x Right Knee

### 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.

Being a catcher involves all muscles and areas of the body. After dynamic stretching be sure to include a few of these conditioning drills for your catchers. Remember, great catchers are agile, strong, and explosive in their movements.

## 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

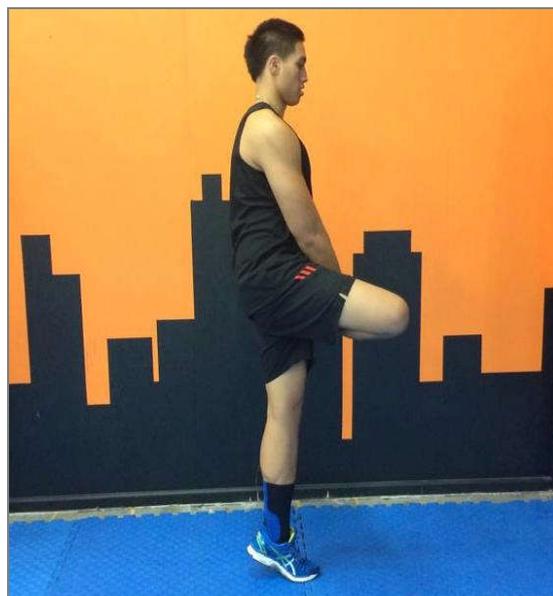
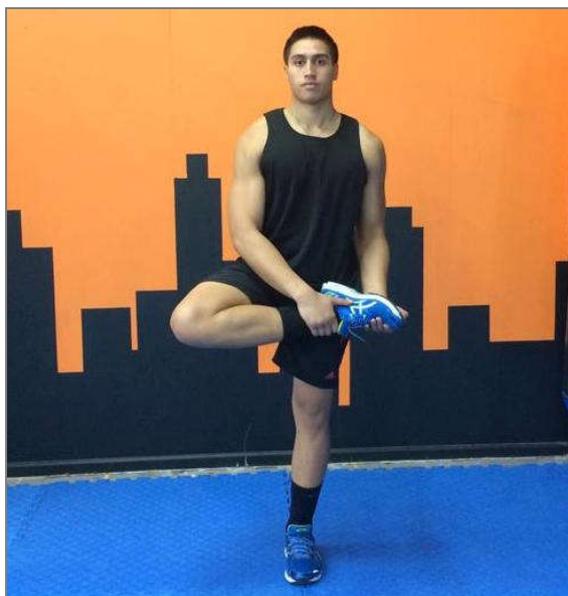
Have your legs shoulder width apart and on the balls of your feet, alternating each foot tapping on the ground as fast as you can. When signalled, drop down into a squat, then kick your legs back enabling you to be in a plank position. Then kick legs back inward to the squat and finally explode up as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



**1. Figure four**

Lift one foot towards the other thigh. Grasp ankle and heel and pull up at the same time as tip 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.

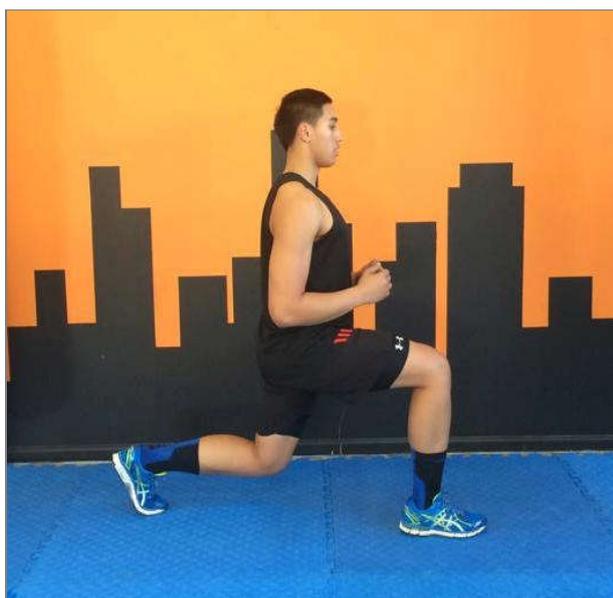
Target – Glutes and hamstrings.



## 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.



## 1. Knee hug

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

Target - Glutes.



## 2. Hip flexor

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

Target – Hip flexors.



### 3. Hand walk

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

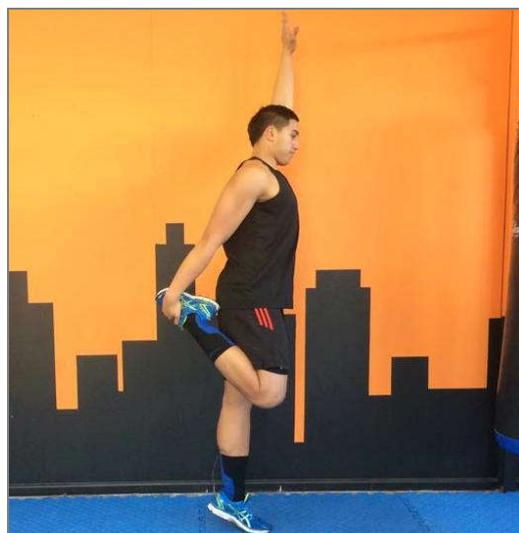
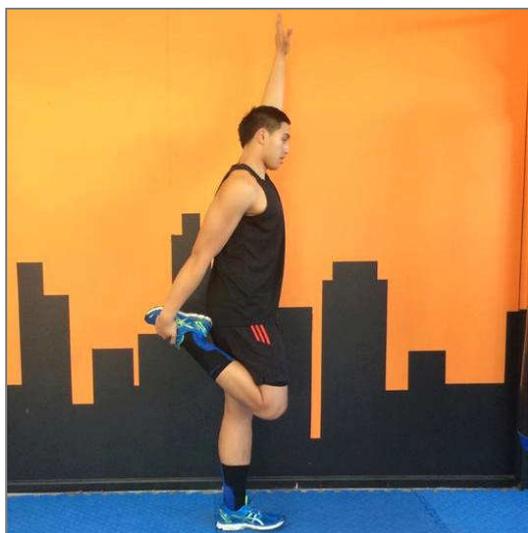
Target - Hamstrings and back.



### 4. Quad Stretch

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

Target – Quads and calves.



## 5. Hip Skips

Drive arms with high knees with skip.



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