

# Framing a Pitch

## ***Don't Ever Let Your Catchers Frame a Pitch!*** *Proper Receiving for Catchers Using the 4 Laws of Good Receiving* Dave Weaver - New England Catching Camp

I suspect the title of this article might have got your attention. It would seem that I am advocating having catchers stop doing something that catchers have always been told and taught to do. Actually I am advocating having them use proper receiving techniques, and avoid some of the techniques that have become common place in catching over the years that do not increase the number of strikes called.

I advocate using techniques that keep strikes looking like strikes. I see so many students come for instruction with the idea that "Framing" is a technique that will fool an umpire into thinking a pitch that is a ball is really a strike. I ask all new students what they believe framing does, and that is almost always their answer, regardless of the age of the catcher. This technique is widely used and I believe actually contributes to close strikes being called as balls.

I will explain my position on "Framing" by explaining the 4 Laws of Good Receiving that I teach all my students. I explain to my students that they need to go behind the plate with these 4 laws firmly imbedded in their technique to be the best receivers they can be.

### **Law #1**

#### **"The Size of the Plate is Determined by the Umpire"**

I ask all new students this question. "How big is home plate??"

I will get all sorts of answers from possible dimensions; to the size I (the catcher) make it look. I guide their thinking to end up with the conclusion that the umpire decides how wide the plate is, the umpire decides how big the strike zone is. It is their job as a good receiver to figure out quickly how the umpire sees the strike zone and how he/she is calling the pitches. It is then their job to work with their pitcher to see that as many pitches as possible are in that zone, understanding full well that sometimes the correct place to put a pitch in certain situations in the count is low and away or maybe even in the dirt.

### **Law #2**

#### **"It's a Catcher's Job to Keep Strikes Looking Like Strikes"**

This is where my teaching tends to go against the flow a little. I do not want to see my catchers catching a pitch that clearly is a ball and pulling, pushing, or somehow moving the glove to try and reposition the pitch at a spot they feel will get them a strike call. I don't want them trying to "Make a ball look like a strike." The best way to keep a strike looking like a strike is to never do anything that would make it look like a ball. The next 2 Laws discuss ways to accomplish that.

### **Law #3**

#### **"Beat the Ball to the Spot"**

My goal for my catchers is that their movements behind the plate when they receive are smooth, "quiet", and not hurried.

They set the target with their glove in the middle of their body. The goal is to have adjusted their position so that their glove is in position to catch the ball before the ball gets there. They want their glove to "Beat the Ball to the Spot." Have the glove already positioned at the spot they'll catch it before the ball gets there.

This is accomplished as follows.

- Their feet are turned up the lines.
- Their heels are in contact with the ground as well as the balls of their feet.

This makes it easy for them to receive any pitch that catches even the edge of the plate by shifting their weight that direction. They still keep the glove in the middle of their body. They can avoid "reaching" for pitches using this technique. When shifting their weight toward the ball they are able to keep their shoulders level at all times. The look they present to the umpire is one of control, and one that says that this pitch is being caught on the catcher's midline, it must be a strike.

Often times a catcher doesn't shift his weight and reaches for the ball on the outside of the plate, even though it may be a close strike, by reaching at the last minute the message sent is that this pitch is not where the catcher wanted it and you may lose the strike call. Have the catcher get the glove to the contact point ahead of the ball.

This technique is done in addition to proper handling of the glove to assure that all parts of the glove are in the strike zone when the ball is caught.

Imagine a catcher catches a ball on the inside edge to a right-hander, and has his thumb in the 6-o'clock

position when the ball hits it. To make that catch he will have to allow his left elbow to go to the left to get the glove in position. His elbow will now be nearly a foot left of the edge of the strike zone. Also, over half of the glove will be to the left of the strike zone. So even if the ball is clearly a strike, all kinds of signals are being sent that this pitch is too far inside.

If the catcher makes a few subtle changes he will ensure that he isn't doing anything to make this strike look like a ball.

First he sets up with his thumb set between 2 and 3-o'clock. This positions his elbow to bend down, not out to the left. He shifts his weight to the left, and positions his glove to catch the left half of the ball. His hand rotates slightly so his thumb is between 12 and 1 o'clock. The ball flies past the front edge of the glove and is caught in the back half of the pocket. The back edge of the glove is vertical, so no part of the glove is out of the strike zone. Since the elbow bent down, no part of the left arm is out of the strike zone. We have caught a close strike and did nothing to make it look like a ball.

#### **Law #4**

##### **"The Glove Never Moves After the Ball Hits It"**

One of the main techniques that many players think is part of good receiving is moving the glove after the ball hits it to a spot that will more likely get them the strike call. I have always felt that most of this technique is insulting to the umpire. He can hear the ball hit the glove, so what's the point to drag or pull the ball somewhere it wasn't? I teach that if the technique I have described above is employed then you will maximize your strike calls and build a better relationship with the umpire by not trying to move a pitch after it hits the glove.

In conclusion: I don't teach framing. I teach good, sound receiving. Just be concerned with keeping strikes looking like strikes and you will succeed as a catcher.