



Additional Tactical Games

Catchers

Happy Gilmore-

Have a catcher start in their blocking position. The coach will toss (under handed) a ball off their chest protector from a few feet in front of them. The catcher will scramble to their feet, collect the ball and throw to second base (or third base).

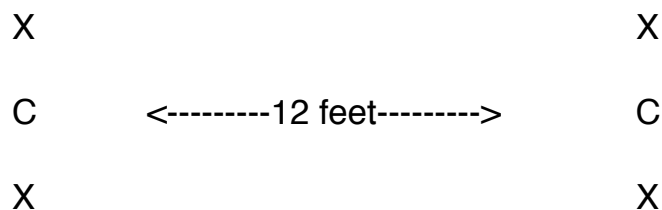
Circle block -

Draw a circle around your catchers (no bigger than 6 feet radius, the smaller the circle the harder the game). Throw balls in the dirt for them to block. They have to block the ball, scramble to their feet and get the ball before it gets out of the circle.

Count the total number each catcher gets before they leave the circle. The winner has the highest percentage.

Goalie -

Set up four cones in a rectangle that is approximately 4 feet by 12 feet as shown below. Set up one catcher in each of the cones. Catchers take turns throwing the ball back and forth in the dirt trying to get the ball by the other catcher between the cones. Every time a catcher blocks a ball, they get two points, if a ball gets through them their opponent gets a point.



Magellan-

Have the catcher start at home plate. The coach throws a ball in the dirt, the catcher blocks it and scrambles to pick it up. Wherever he picks it up, he squats and the process repeats. After has blocked 4 balls, the coach measures the distance from where he finished to where he started. The player with the shortest distance from where they started wins.

This game emphasizes keeping the ball close to you when you block and scrambling quickly to get the ball.

Snap it!-

Set up a fielder at each base and a catcher behind the plate. The coach will stand about 40 feet in front of the catcher. As the coach throws the ball to the catcher, he yells out a base. The catcher receives and snaps to the base called by the coach. Another coach or player times and records the time from the catcher's glove to the fielders glove.

Fetch!-

The catcher starts in his blocking position behind the plate, the coach rolls a ball to the backstop. The catcher sprints to the ball and throws it to the next catcher who is simulating the pitcher covering home plate.

To measure this game, the coach can time player to the ball and keep track of how often they complete the throw back to the pitcher.

Ryan Lyle Drill (5-hole drill)-

This drill is dedicated to one of my former catching coaches. His biggest pet peeve was a ball getting between the catcher's legs (5-hole). To prevent this, catchers must emphasize on getting their glove and bare hand between their legs in blocking position first.

This game is a good game for catchers to do inside. The catcher gets in their secondary stance (runners on base) about 4-5 feet from the wall. A coach stands right behind them and throws the ball off the wall trying to aim it so the ball goes to the opening between their legs. The player has to react, get into blocking position, and keep the ball from getting through their 5-hole.

The coach throws 5-7 baseballs in one round and the winner is the one who lets the fewest get through their 5-hole.

Infielders

Catch to release timing-

This drill can be done in the athlete exploration phase of technical skill development or as a competition between athletes during the intermediate performance stage. After giving athletes their times, allow them see if they can get quicker while still maintaining their arm strength and accuracy.

Set up all of your infielders at the shortstop position (you can move them to 2nd base or 3rd base to adjust the distance). Your infielder's goal is to get rid of the ball as quickly as they can while still putting enough on it to get it to first base accurately.

Coaches will roll the ball right at the fielder from about 20 feet in front of them. A second coach (or player) will time each fielder from the time the ball hits their glove until the time they release the ball. If the throw is not accurate do not the the player their time.

After a few rounds of giving the athletes their times, bring them together and discuss what techniques produced the fastest times. Below are some questions you may ask to begin the discussion:

- 1.) What did you do on the repetition when you got your best time?
- 2.) What did you do on the repetition when you got your slowest time?
- 3.) What did you have to do to ensure you still had enough arm strength to get the ball to first base?
- 4.) What could you do to improve your time while still keeping enough arm strength to get the ball accurately to first base?

Give the players another few rounds to improve their technique and timing. Then have another round of questioning.

If you are using this in the athlete exploration phase, explain the technique you would like your athletes to use and have them try the game again. If you are using this in the intermediate performance stage, have your athletes compete against one another to get the fastest time.

EXTENSION FOR ADVANCED PLAYERS

Follow the same procedure, but have the players use a backhand technique on a ball to their throwing side.

Catch to glove timing-

This tactical game is set up the same way as the "catch to release timing" game. The difference is now the coach or player will stop the clock when the ball hits the first basemen's glove. This adds the element of arm strength to the timing. Players must

learn to maximize quick footwork while gaining enough momentum toward their target to get the fastest time.

Questions can be similar to the “catch to release” game, but there are a few important additional question that should be asked during this game:

- 1.) Which technique produced a faster time, getting rid of the ball quickly, or trying to put more on the ball but taking more time to get rid of it?
- 2.) What technique produced the fastest time for you?

Again, this game can be used as athlete exploration or to create competition among your athletes during intermediate performance.

Ground balls against the clock-

Once your athletes have moved past the basic performance stage and are able to field ground balls and throw them to first base with no runner, no specified time, and with a high percentage of success, begin having them field ground balls against the clock.

Coaches will hit ground balls at varying speeds. Infielders have 4.5 seconds (average high school runner on 90 feet bases) from the time the ball is hit until the ball hits the first basemen’s glove. Depending on your level of play and base distance you can adjust the time appropriately. It may be a good idea to time your players home to first, then use the average of that time as their target.

This tactical game adds the element of variability as the ball is hit at differing speeds. Players will need to get rid of the ball more quickly when the ball is hit slower and will have more time when the ball is not hit as hard. Infielders will need to make adjustments to keep their times under 4.5 seconds. If they are unable to make adjustments, it may be necessary to return to intermediate questioning, or basic performance stage before moving on to the game conditions stage.

Ground balls against runners-

After your athletes have advanced past the intermediate performance stage and are ready for game competition, select a group of players to hit the ball off a tee from home plate, on the ground to the infielders. This tactical game closely simulates what infielders will be facing in real game situations. The added variability here is the speed of the runner. Infielders must calculate the speed of the ball, the speed of the runner, and their own abilities on every ground ball to determine how much time they have. Competing against live runners will help them develop this internal clock.

A variation of this game is to have a coach hit the ground balls and have the runners leave from the right handed batter’s box on contact. Use this variation if your players are unable to hit quality ground balls off the tee consistently.

Double play catch to release timings-

This tactical game can be done with either a coach or a player feeding the double play. This is best used for more advanced players in the athlete exploration phase of technical development, but it could be used in the intermediate performance phase.

Either have a player or coach feed a double play at the bag from the SS or 2B position. Having a coach feed the play at the bag may be better in the player exploration phase so the feeds are more consistent. Having players feed the play at the bag may be better during the intermediate performance stage.

A coach or player will time the player on the turn from the time the ball hits their glove, until the time they release the ball. Still have them throw the full distance they will have to in the game so they cannot sacrifice arm strength for quickness getting rid of the ball.

After giving infielders a few rounds to try to improve their times, bring them together and question them on what techniques were able to produce the quickest time while still allowing enough arm strength to make an accurate throw. You might be surprised that not all infielders produce the quickest time with the same technique. This questioning phase will help determine what works best for each player and may give you some insight into which techniques work best for which types of players.

Double play catch to glove timings-

This tactical game is similar to the “catch to release timing” for double plays. The difference is the clock will start when the ball hits the glove of the turn man, and stop when it hits the first basemen’s glove.

This game is good to create competition between infielders during the intermediate performance stage.

Double plays against the clock-

Similar to the “ground balls against the clock” technical game, coaches will hit a ground ball and infielder will have 4.5 seconds (or an age and skill appropriate time) to turn a double play. Be sure to include all age appropriate versions of the double play (5-4-3, 6-4-3, 4-6-3, 3-6-3/1, 1-6-3, 1-2-3, 6U-3, 5U-3, 4U-3).

If you emphasize the goal is to get one out and the second out is a bonus, players will begin to recognize the speed at which they are able to make the turn in 4.5 seconds and when they cannot and they should focus on getting one out. Use questioning to help athletes determine what variables may be involved in being able to turn the double play.

Double plays with live runners-

Take away the clock and add live runners to the tactical game. Infielders will now need to take the speed of the ball, the speed of the runners, and their own abilities into account when determining they will be able to turn two, or will only be able to get one out.

Set up runners in all double play situations (1st, 1st/2nd, bases loaded) and let your players make decisions about where the ball needs to go. Be sure to hit the ball to all positions at all speeds so they get a good feel of when to try for two and when to be sure of one out.

Depending on the age and skill level of your players, getting one out may be considered a success and getting two outs may be a bonus.

SAFETY CONCERNS: Be sure that your base runners slide into each base and that they follow all league rules for sliding into bases on double plays.

Around the world-

Start all of your infielders at first base. Have them field a ground ball cleanly and flip to a covering pitcher. If they don't field it cleanly, or don't flip it accurately to the pitcher, they stay at first base and do it again. If they do field it cleanly and flip it cleanly, they move to second base. Continue hitting ground balls until everyone has fielded one cleanly and flipped it to the pitcher.

Leave one or two first basemen at first base to receive throws for the rest of the drill. Once all of the players have successfully moved to second, repeat the process. Players must field the ball cleanly and make an accurate throw to move to short stop. Repeat this at short stop moving the players to third base when they are successful.

The game is over when all of your infielders reach third base, field it cleanly and throw to first accurately.

EXTENSION: Have your infielders go back around the world to first base.

VARIATION: Eliminate the throw to first base. This will allow two coaches to hit fungos (one moves to the next position once 1/2 of the fielders have moved) and move the game more quickly.

21 outs-

Put at least one infielder at each position (including catcher and pitcher). The goal of the game is to get 21 consecutive outs (a full 7 inning game). If your league only plays 6 inning games, call this game 18 outs.

Hit routine ground balls to varying positions in the infield. They must field the ball cleanly and throw accurately to first base to record an out. If someone makes an error, other infielders get to "pick them up" by turning a double play on the next ground ball. If they make an error then fail to turn a double play, they will start over at zero. Leave plenty of time for this drill as it is difficult, and your team will need to start over several times.

This game is best used at the intermediate performance or game competition phase. It creates tension and makes your players learn to perform under pressure.

VARIATION: Put a clock on your player and require that each out be recorded in under 4.5 seconds.

VARIATION #2: Add runners make the game more like an actual game.

VARIATION #3: Add outfielders and include fly balls and pop-ups.

Circle catch-

This game is best used as an athlete exploration for making throws to first base on the run. Athletes must learn that their ball will move to the arm side as they deliver it to first base. The farther they are apart, the more the ball will tail.

Have two players start 20 to 30 feet apart with one baseball. They will begin jogging counter clockwise in a circle. After making a few circles, they will begin playing catch on the run. They will quickly learn that if they don't "lead" their partner they will not complete the throw.

Have your players compete to see who can complete the most throws at given distances.

Outfielders

Rabbit and Hunter-

Pair players up on the left field line about half way between the skin of the infield and the outfield fence. The coach stands around second base with a fungo bat and a bucket of baseballs. The first pair starts running in an arc across the field toward the other foul line. The rabbit (fielder) goes first with the hunter (collector) following about 15 - 20 feet behind. The coach hits ground ball, fly ball or line drive fungos to the rabbit. The rabbit fields the ball and drops it behind him for the hunter to collect. As soon as the rabbit drops the ball, he keeps running waiting for the next fungo. The coach should try to hit 4 or 5 fungos to each pair before they reach the right field foul line.

Groups go one at a time (unless you are fortunate enough to have two fungo hitters). When each group goes from right field to left field, the rabbit and hunter switch.

This tactical game is good for players who need to work on catching the ball on the run.

NFL Wide Receiver-

Pair athletes up who have similar athletic abilities. Select one to be the wide receiver and one to be the defensive back. Have them start from about 15 feet to the side of the coach (quarterback) who has a bucket of baseballs. The coach says “go” and the wide receiver has to try to get open and catch a pass from the coach.

To add a baseball twist, you can have the wide receiver call “ball, ball, ball” after the ball reaches it’s apex. After the receiver calls the ball, the defender may stay close to the receiver (echoing, see Infielder/Outfielder communication), but may not try to interfere with him catching the ball.

This tactical game teaches players to catch the ball on the run, with distractions, and allows them to work on the infield/outfield communication system.

Turn and burn-

Set up cones in a “V” with the two top cones about 40-50 feet from the bottom cone. Have each player start at the bottom cone facing away from the top two cones. The coach points to one of the two back cones. The player turns and sprints to the cone as fast as they can. The coach times the player to each cone.

After every player knows their time, repeat the exercise, but this time have the coach throw a “fly ball” for them to catch about 5-10 feet beyond the cone they point to. Give them more than enough time to get under the ball. The coach should time them to the cone (not until they catch the ball). The time to the cone should be about the same regardless of if they are going to catch a fly ball or just sprinting.

This teaches outfielders to sprint to the spot and wait for the ball, not trying to time it up.

Get behind it! -

Set up five cones about five feet apart in a straight line and a target at an age appropriate distance for an outfielder to throw. The distance should be attainable, but not easy for the age group.

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The coach will need at least five baseballs. The game begins by having a coach throw the ball straight up over the first cone. The player gets behind the ball, catches it and throws it to the target. As soon as he releases the it, the coach throws a ball over the next cone back. The player repeats this five times getting behind the ball and catching it coming through each time.

As you move back, it becomes even more important that the player get behind the ball and catching it with momentum coming forward for them to reach the target.

Make this drill a competition by counting the number of times each player hits the target. If they hit the target but do not get behind the ball properly, or do not catch the ball with their glove foot coming forward.

Catch to release timing-

Set up a target an appropriate distance from the fielders. Hit the outfielders fly balls and ground balls, time them from when the ball hits their glove until they release the ball (even if they miss the target).

Score this game as follows:

Name	Catch to Release Time	C2R Rank	Target Hits/ Total Tries	Target Hits Rank	Total Rank

Whoever has the lowest total rank wins

Catch to target timing-

Set up exactly like to the “catch to release timing” drill, only stop the clock when the ball gets to the target (even if they miss the target):

Score this game as follows:

Name	Catch to Target Time	C2T Rank	Target Hits/ Total Tries	Target Hits Rank	Total Rank

Whoever has the lowest total rank wins

Five ball game-

Set four cones in a 20 foot square with one in the middle of the square. Set a target at an appropriate distance for an outfielder throw. The player starts at the center of the square. The coach stands about 70 feet (or age appropriate distance) in front of the cones with five baseballs.

The coach lobs balls into the cones, the player has to get behind the ball and catch it with their momentum coming toward the coach. Advanced players can do a crow hop (long step) after catching each ball. The coach will throw the next ball as soon as the player catches the previous one. Be sure to challenge the athlete by moving the ball around the square.

After the coach has thrown four balls, throw a ground ball to the middle of the cones. The player will do a “do or die” play and throw to the target.

Fancy pants-

I have two cautions about this drill; use tennis balls, and once you introduce this drill to your players it is the only drill they will want to do. Have the player stand in front of and facing the coach. The coach will throw a fly ball (with a tennis ball) behind him so that he has to go back. The player will sprint to a spot behind where the ball is going to land. He then has to catch the ball by reaching his glove hand behind him and through his legs.

The purpose of this drill is to teach players to sprint to a spot (they have to get there early or they won't have time to set up) and to get behind the ball. The real purpose of this drill is to have fun while still teaching something.

Rob It!-

This is another drill that your players will absolutely love and will want to do every practice. This game has the potential to be dangerous and communication is the key to keeping players safe.

As a lead-up to this game teach your players how to communicate with an outfielder running toward a fence. Have players run toward the fence while other outfielders yell at them how much room they have. As players get older they should be able to judge if the player will come into contact with the fence or if they will have room. If they feel they have room, they would should yell “you’ve got room!” If they feel they will run into the fence if they try to catch the ball, they should yell “fence!”

To run the “Rob It!” drill, set up the players about 50 feet (or age appropriate distance) from the outfield fence. The coach should be at a distance where he can hit (or throw) fungos near the fence. Have a player going after the ball while the others communicate with him how far he is, or if he might run into the wall.

The game gets very exciting when a player robs a home run!