

Parentally Speaking - December 2007

How do you help a player who has been hit by a thrown ball and injured overcome the fear of getting hit again and learn to catch properly?

This is similar to players who are afraid to stand close enough to home plate when batting because they are scared that they will get hit with the ball. For those players I recommend getting some soft sponge-rubber balls and almost playing dodgeball with them. Throw the balls at them at various speeds and prove to them, without them having to fear getting hurt, that they can get out of the way the majority of the time.

Perhaps the same approach can work in this situation. Build the player's confidence by playing catch with him or her using softer balls. That way he or she can re-learn the mechanics of catching the ball properly without worrying about getting injured. As confidence builds, start throwing the balls harder, stressing that the player catch the balls out in front of the body so that he or she can see them go into the glove. Also stress using two hands when catching, with the bare hand following the ball into the glove.

Once the player is catching the ball regularly – and properly – using the sponge balls, explain that catching a real baseball is just as easy. Everything is done the same way; the only difference is that the ball is a little bit harder. Maybe after he or she catches about 20 sponge balls in a row, you can tell the player that you think he or she is ready to catch any type of ball. At that point you can try tossing baseballs lightly, again building confidence until the player is ready to try to catch some more difficult throws. Remember to be patient and sensitive to the past history and fears throughout this process.

By Cal Ripken Jr.