

The Most Dangerous Position in Baseball

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Is it the Catcher? No. Third Base? Guess again. A pitcher in the aluminum bat world? Close! All equally dangerous, but there is one more that is much more likely to injure players and coaches!

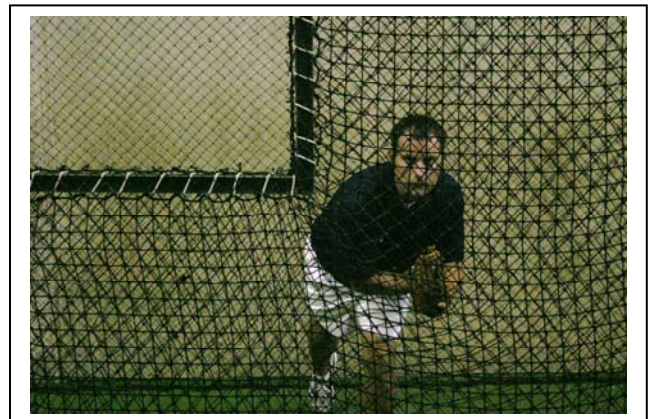
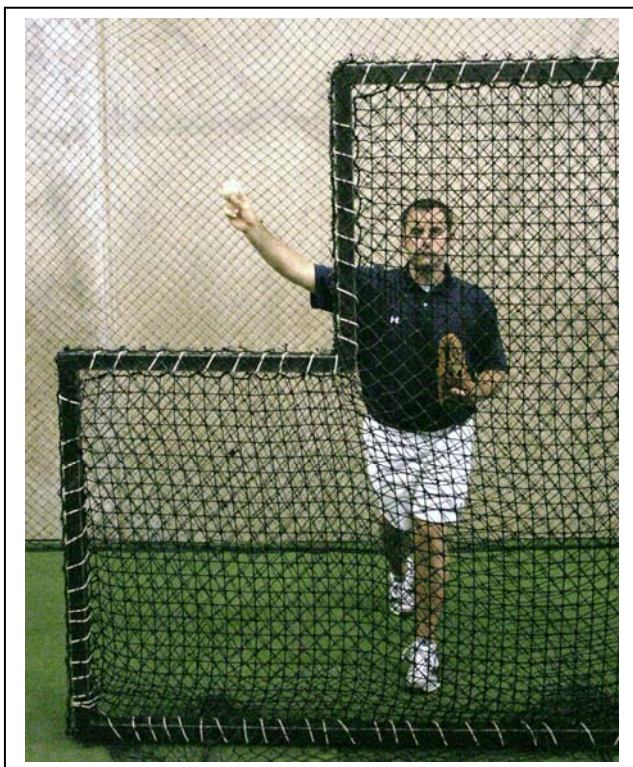
It has been my direct experience that the most severe accidents that occur in indoor/outdoor baseball facilities are to the face and upper torso of adults and players pitching batting practice behind "L" screens.

The awkwardness of the L design presents a mental or neuromuscular challenge to those throwing behind its protection. The L screen is designed to allow a thrower to normally release a ball in his standard throwing motion while remaining to the side protected from a line drive hit directly back at him as show in the pictures below.

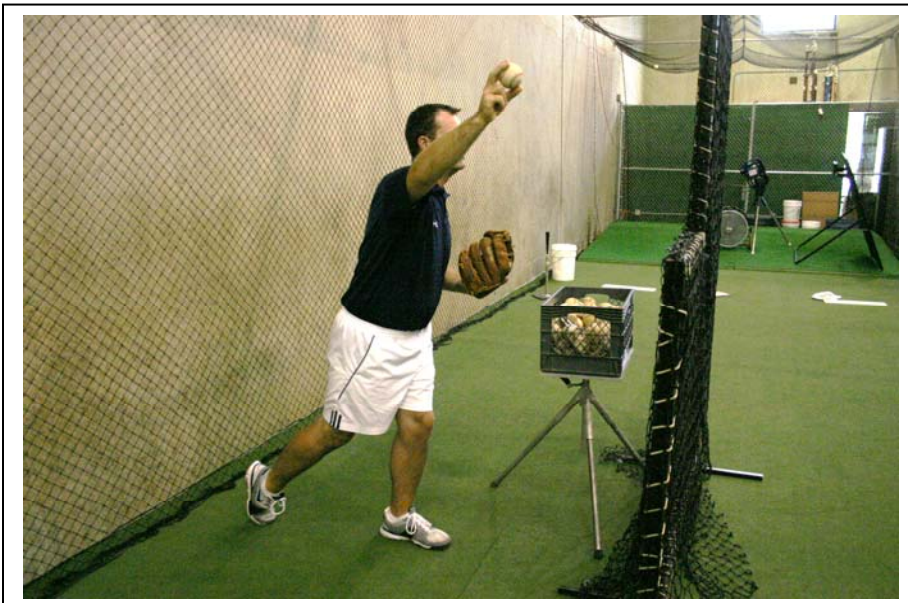
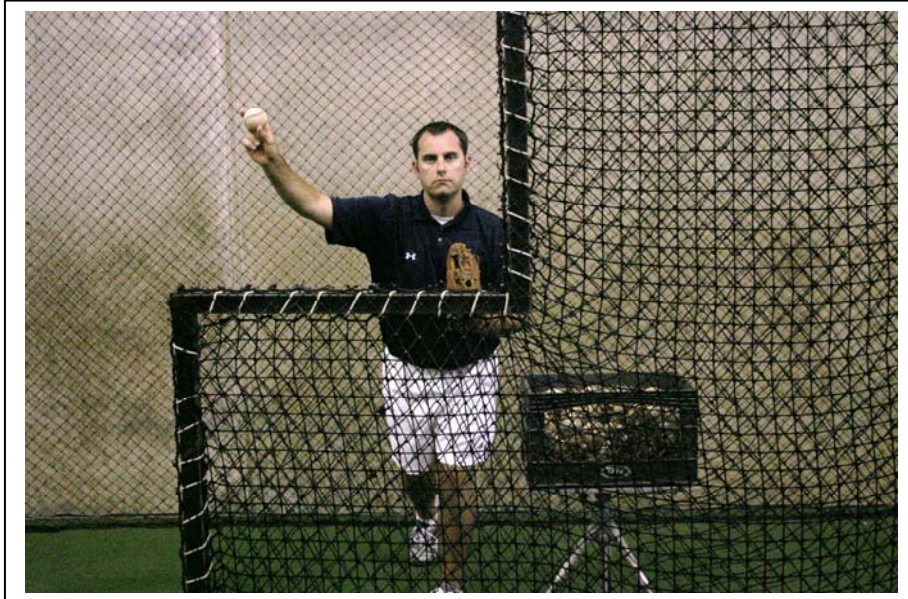
The notch seemingly forces throwers to release the ball far to their right. This often results in an inaccurate pitch, delaying batting practice and frustrating the hitter.

This challenge is only in the throwers mind because they are not accustomed to this obstruction. Throwing behind an L screen is very uncomfortable to the recreation coach, position player tossing batting practice or the young player. Granted in the beginning of every practice it is difficult to throw accurately behind the L screen. It will take a few throws to make an adjustment even for an experienced thrower. Most of all, a prudent coach will train other players AND COACHES with repeated instruction using a specific safe method.

Maximum safety requires the body to totally remain behind the upright leg of the "L" and only allow the arm to be exposed during the throw. The body's deceleration or follow through process will carry the arm and torso behind the "L" after the ball leaves the hand and before it arrives within the batters reach. The correct release and follow through motion is shown in the pictures.



There are two recurring problems that I have observed for years, 1) throwers believe they can duck behind the L after they throw the ball. 2) The ball bucket is placed too close in front of them prohibiting the thrower enough space to follow through. The second solution is simple...move the bucket behind you. Incorrect positions from the front and side are shown in pictures. The correct positioning is shown in the picture with ball bucket well behind and thrower extended to and behind the screen.





***By far the most injuries occur to players and coaches
who really believe they can duck.***

I do not believe anyone throwing behind an L has not experienced at least a close call with injury throwing behind the L screen. People are seriously hurt because they believe they can **duck behind** the “L” **after throwing the ball** and before the batter hits the ball. It has not worked in the past. Please do not underestimate the injuries that you can receive. Many players and coaches have suffered painful and serious injuries - from face fractures to cuts requiring stitches, to permanently lost sight. Tragically this year - even death. Feeling remorse on the way to the hospital is not sufficient. I personally have provided first aid to many a messy eye injury. As I'm sure you are aware of, baseball injuries involve either a band-aid or ... a towel to stop bleeding!

“Duck and cover,” to borrow a phrase from the 50's, is considered a normal practice if not an unconscious practice for an amazing majority of people I have witnessed over the years. As in many aspects of baseball people assume they know much more than they do. When I have approached them to provide coaching, as remarkable as it seems, they are often offended or under the illusion that they are throwing correctly. In our academy I have even resorted to videoing them to make my point.

I have concluded that reason throwers “duck and cover,” is simply embarrassment. It is hard to correctly throw behind L screens, especially without practice. Continually throwing in the dirt, outside the strike zone or hitting the batter will generate a lot of loud criticism from the players. The easy way out is to move away from the L and throw as if the screen was not there.

Surprisingly many serious injuries occur to adults who are coaching very young children. In the spring of each year they rely on last year's experience. Last year's players were younger and not as strong. They also feel safe using the “duck and cover” method style of throwing because last season they beat the odds; nothing happened to them. Again this

does not work. Even advanced coaches, becoming tired after throwing 150+ pitches in batting practice, get careless from the fatigue and do not finish the motion and fail to place their body behind the screen.

College coach and a nine year old killed in April throwing batting practice

Here is why the duck and cover approach does not work. A baseball traveling at 60 MPH takes less than ½ second to fly 46' from the pitcher to home (Or a ball going 85 MPH at 60'6"). Fifty percent (50%) of that time, about .2 of a second, is considered pitch recognition time, as it covers 23' or half way to the plate. That is the limited time and distance for the eyes to communicate with the brain. That instant process results in a decision to act. The remainder of that time, .2 and 23' of distance, is devoted to the swing.

The reverse is true. The ball can fly off the aluminum bat at a similar speed or faster time than it was thrown. The exact same formula is true for the pitcher's protection; .2 sec. for ball recognition and .2 sec. The pitcher must return to an up right position after the throw, raise the glove and catch the ball or consequently absorb the force of the ball with the body. This is why at Pinkman Baseball training we are so emphatic about pitching mechanics that result in players ending up in a proper fielding position.

BUT here is a major factor that inflicts injury. When coaches throw from behind the screen they are rarely 46 feet away (or in high school/college 60'6"); thus decreasing the already "blink of an eye" reaction time.

Avoid Law Suits

Failure to properly maintain excellent condition of L screens in batting cages dramatically exposes programs to expensive, easily settled law suits. In my visits to fields it is not unusual for me to see tattered nets, full of holes, strung up with cord. The structure is often damaged or broken, pitifully taped together. A replacement pillow case net that slides over the top of the structure providing double netting protection, is around \$150. I encourage every parent to inspect the L screens in the cages. Hold the program accountable **in advance** or if necessary, pay for the replacement your self. Or perhaps, regret that you didn't on the way to the emergency room.

During the last week of April 2009, a college coach in Virginia and a nine year old in New Jersey were killed throwing batting practice. Please don't become another injury statistic.

I personally continue to offer instruction in regards to throwing behind "L" screens. Some coaches are a bit put off by "unnecessary" training. Many of them took that instruction lightly or not at all silently citing that up unto that point, they had never been hurt. This is remarkably foolish. The casual, even cocky, manner in which many coaches approach this subject is frightening!

Earlier this year, after noticing many coaches at risk in league that was renting our facility, we sent out a newsletter with this message. The newsletter wasn't out 24 hours before one of their coaches was hit in the face with a ball.

Think this is too basic? Here's a challenge! Set up a video camera behind your cage as if you were videoing the batter. But video your L screen throwers. Do not tell the thrower you are videoing him. The both of you will be in for a real shock!

If this sounds too direct... no apologies. It may prevent an injury to you.