



RETURN TO BASEBALL / SOFTBALL

Goal: To rehabilitate your knee on the field while correcting previous bad habits.

Process: Within days of your surgery, I want you to practice movement patterns from the ball field that will additionally serve to rehabilitate your knee. Get into your batting stance and step into a pitch. See the ball-- visualize the pitcher's release point. Now try the same thing with fielding a fly ball. Put on a glove and follow the imaginary ball coming in. Take an easy stride as you toss it back to the infield. Doing these simple visualizations will really make a difference until you're ready to get outside.

Feedback from a knowledgeable coach is especially important in sports that use both upper and lower extremities as it can be that much easier to get into bad habits. Remember, nothing ruins shoulders faster than weak legs! Rotator cuff exercises and other upper body exercises are key for every throwing athlete, but especially those returning from injury.

You can perform each Level of the "Return to Baseball" program 3-4 days per week alternating with "soft workouts" on the other days. You probably need to spend 2 weeks to perfect your technique at each Level (though it may seem painfully slow, this is not the time to rush). If you have pain or swelling: RICE, and back down one level until the swelling resolves. "Quick step" run at first (see chapter 3) before progressing to a jog (see Return to Running earlier in this chapter).

Watch games at the park or on TV with an eye toward player patterns e.g. how the pitcher works a batter or how good fielders position themselves. Envision yourself on the field and mentally react to the flow of the game as a smarter player. Remember, you no longer see the old you. You now see the new and improved you: the Jackie Robinson reincarnated you.

LEVEL A:

PURPOSE	Light toss. Swing Simulation.	
PROTOCOL	Activity	Time
	Warm-up on the bike.	
	Shoulder strengthening with stretch bands.	
	Skills:	
	Play catch with a partner about 20 feet.	5 min
	Step forward and throw 40' (light effort).	5 min
	Simulate full swing with a light bat.	2 min
	Repeat 1 time if feeling great	12 min
		Total = 24 min

COMMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All throws with a partner need to be light. Think about starting the throw with your legs and your core. • Avoid sudden lateral movements to catch the ball. • Stretch and ice the knee (and shoulder) after the workout. • When was your last eye appointment? Now's a good time.
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LEVEL B:

PURPOSE	Channeling Willie and the Babe. Light toss, grounders. Bat swings w/ tee.	
PROTOCOL	<p style="text-align: center;">Activity</p> <p>Warm-up on the bike. Shoulder strengthening with stretch bands. Skills: Catch and throw easy. Step forward and throw (medium speed). Take some grounders at a slow speed. Easy swings with a batting tee Repeat 1 time if feeling great</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Time</p> <p>2 min 10 min 10 min 5 min 27 min Total = 54 min</p>
COMMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your throws to your partner can be faster than Level A, but stayed focused on accuracy. Increase the distance of the throws to 60 feet. • Avoid sudden lateral movements to catch the ball. • Work on proper mechanics for catching slow ground balls. Ready position → squat → scoop → set → throw. Do your knees bend? • Cool down in the water if possible. Bring an old bat and do some harder swings underwater. 	

LEVEL C:

PURPOSE	Working on weaknesses. Grounders. Batting Practice	
PROTOCOL	<p style="text-align: center;">Activity</p> <p>Warm-up. Shoulder strengthening with stretch bands.</p> <p>Skills: Vary catch and throw from 20 to 90 feet, slow to fast. Take grounders at medium speed and begin lateral movements. Swing at medium speed pitches. Hit 10+ line drives up the middle.</p> <p>Return to full practice at 50% speed initially. Advance to 100% over the next 3 weeks. Base running is only allowed if you have progressed to Return to Running LEVEL C.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Time</p> <p>5 min</p> <p>10 min</p> <p>10 min</p> <p>60 min</p> <p>Total = 85 min</p>
COMMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lateral movements and jogging after balls is now allowed. • You can now enter the batting cage and take medium speed pitches. This is the time to work on proper mechanics. Get some coaching! • Cool down and ice. • For Pete's sake, NO feet-first sliding! Headfirst sliding is safer for your knees but requires practice. 	

Return to Competition:

The nice thing about baseball is you can get yourself back into the games gradually: designated hitter with a pinch runner; one or two innings in the field, one inning on the mound, etc. What you must guard against is yourself. Are you the type of competitor that has to take out the catcher at home plate even if you're already ahead by 9 runs? Do you have to slide every time? If so, you have to wait a bit longer before getting into games. Again, no one plays nine innings in spring training! You are in spring training mode. A gradual, safe return is worth more than that tenth run.