

LEARNING THE  
MENTAL SIDE OF  
THE  
GAME  
OF  
BASEBALL



## **TOPICS COVERED**

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# FUNDAMENTALS OF THE MENTAL GAME

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- Take responsibility for your THOUGHTS and ACTIONS.
- COMMIT TO A MISSION:
  - know why you play baseball
  - know what type of ball player you want to be
  - know what you want to accomplish in a game
- Make your actions consistent with your mission.
- PLAY ONE PITCH AT A TIME, PLAY CONFIDENT AND FOCUSED ON EACH PITCH.
- Do not think about past or future plays.
- FOCUS ON PLAYING THE GAME instead of the outcome of your past performances.
- Realize that you CAN NOT CONTROL WHAT HAPPENS AROUND YOU, but you can CONTROL YOUR RESPONSE TO IT, and that YOU MUST BE IN CONTROL OF YOURSELF BEFORE YOU CAN CONTROL YOUR PERFORMANCE.
- DEVELOP your mental skills so that you can perform to the best of your ability.
- PRACTICE what you are GOING TO DO IN A GAME.
- LEARN each day.
- Keep it SIMPLE.

# ESTABLISH GOALS

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## 1) WHY DO YOU PLAY BASEBALL?

Ask yourself why you play baseball. Please write out 5 reasons on separate sheet of paper.

## 2) WHAT TYPE OF PLAYER DO YOU WANT TO BE?

This is a very important question...your answer gives direction as to what goals you will set for yourself. Once your goals are established, these goals should have you focus your time and energy on things that you can control. Please write a paragraph talking about the type of player you want to be.

In getting to your goals you should understand that successful players have had many of the following traits in common. Please note that to be a successful ball player you don't have to have all of these traits but you will find that many players have quite a few of these traits in common:

### CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL PLAYERS

courage	honesty	dedication	sportsmanship
fun	unselfishness	enjoyment	mental toughness
focus	leadership	composure	concentration
pride	hard work	relentlessness	consistency
integrity	tenacity	desire to learn	respect for the game
confidence	love of the game	commitment	desire to compete

## 2) WHAT CHARACTERISTICS DO YOU HAVE?

Pick out all the traits you think you have and write them down.

Before we move on to your goals let's cover three of the behavioral traits from above.

### 1.) FUN AND ENJOYMENT

"Sometimes you have to say to yourself that you're going to have fun and feel good before you go out there. Normally, you have fun after you do well, but I wanted to have fun before I did well and that helped."

- Dave Winfield, Hall of Famer

Ask yourself this question, write down a short response...

1) Do you truly enjoy playing baseball? What is "fun" about the game to you?

## **2.) RESPECT FOR THE GAME**

Hall of Famer Carl Yaztrzemsky said the off-season prepared him mentally. "I hated to do weights. I hated to run. But I did them. I swung a lead bat and hit balls – 300 to 400 a day – into a net for one reason: to toughen myself mentally."

Carl Yaztrzemsky is telling you that no matter what it took, he was going to do what he needed to do to get better so that he would be one of the best in the game.

**Ask yourself these 2 questions...write down a short response...**

1) Do you treat yourself with the same respect?

2) Do you show the game the respect that it deserves by doing all that you can to make yourself a better player?

Remember, there are no "little" things in baseball. When we say do the little things, understand that they actually a **big** thing. Any little advantage you can give yourself can turn into a BIG advantage for your team.

## **3.) PRIDE**

A strong sense of pride in your baseball performance motivates you to prepare for each practice and game and to play above your physical feelings. Put forth the extra effort to get the most out of the practice/game, so at the end of the day you can reflect and ask yourself "Am I proud of what I did today?" This is a not a question of performance, but a question of effort. So a better question to ask yourself after every baseball practice or game is "Am I proud of the effort I gave today?"

### **5 Steps to knowing the kind of player you want to be...**

- 1.) Have a dream!
- 2.) Set goals that are specific and achievable.
- 3.) Make the goals difficult but attainable.
- 4.) Talk about your goals positively.
- 5.) Adjust your goals when achieved and set new goals to strive for.

### **Quotes for thought...**

***-“A goal without a plan is just a wish.”***

***-“You have to learn the rules of the game. And then you have to play better than anyone else.”***

***-“Set your goals high, and don't stop till you get there.”***

# EXPECTATIONS

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## THE GOLDEN RULE OF EXPECTATIONS:

**PLAY THE GAME OF BASEBALL FOR YOURSELF, NOT FOR OTHERS.**

Look at it this way...

The player who can keep his joy for baseball is the one who hasn't let others' needs take priority over his own. He is also the one most likely to perform best which will help keep the fun in the game. His senses will stay focused and sharp, and he'll be able to concentrate on what he is doing. He will be in control of himself and, as much as is possible, in control of his situation in the game.

The player who can understand the difference between where he is trying to go, as opposed to where others want him to end up, approaches his game from the right direction. He takes the initial responsibility of choosing his own direction. He **makes adjustments** with the help of his coaches, knowing where he is, knowing where he wants to be, and knowing how to get there. Adjustments to one's development are made **one step at a time**. Being relaxed and confident in the final outcome from hard work thru focused practice will result in being a much more effective. **Never be a failure**. Be willing to try and fail, but never give up. Giving up is the ultimate failure. Giving up is shown through many expressions, such as body language, facial expressions, as well as language. If you are willing to fail, and can push through it, you will find out just how good you can be. Pushing through failures, making adjustments are a HUGE part of becoming a true winner. If you can do this while maintaining composure and making progress, you will be successful.

Next, set your own expectations. Do not try to live up to others' expectations for you. **Parents are often guilty of forcing expectations on a player**. This can ultimately result in the loss of the "joy" one should be having. More often than not parents are setting expectations on your baseball career were they were not able to meet the same expectations. That isn't to say you can't meet their expectations, you possibly can. But make sure it is in a **plan set with goals that are attainable by you**. Grow and push these goals as you progress.

## **Quotes for thought...**

***"I am not in this world to live up to other people's expectations, nor do I feel that the world must live up to mine."***

***"Don't lower your expectations to meet your performance. Raise your level of performance to meet your expectations. Expect the best of yourself, and then do what is necessary to make it a reality."***

# DEDICATION

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Exceptional achievers are willing to push themselves further and higher. They have made a commitment to themselves. They've set goals for themselves and hold themselves responsible for achieving those goals. The next step they understand is to work tirelessly to achieve those goals. **High achievers are willing to work hard. They want to work hard.** Even those who don't enjoy some of the tasks still perform them with all of their effort, because they are committed to efforts that help them reach their goals.

These players start with a desire and from there they build goals for themselves that show their desire and are motivated by their goals. **They DEDICATE themselves to SUCCEEDING.** The more committed they are the easier their efforts become. Mental and physical energies are devoted to what is defined as a challenge, not a burden. For them, any effort is worth giving.

**DESIRE + GOALS + DEDICATION = SUCCESS**

So, advice to young players would be to make a decision to want to get better. Be the best you can be. To do this you must dedicate yourself to getting better. **That means take the time to practice what you need to practice. When you practice give your full attention and effort. Every drill, swing, throw must be done with a purpose.** If you are just going through the motions, **YOU WILL FAIL.** Do everything you need to do to get better and you will become a player that is **dedicated.**

Hall of Famer Don Mattingly was talking to ESPN/MLB Network reporter Peter Gammons, "I want to improve every day in every facet of the game. I hate to hear that a guy's not a good defensive player. There shouldn't be any bad defensive players, not if they work hard enough. It's as simple as that. There are tons of players who could be a lot better. I'd like to have some of the talent of those guys. Give me their talent and I'll do some really big things." Ironically, former Yankees great Mickey Mantle was looking back on the ratio between talent and dedication during his playing days. He claimed to regret the years that he feels he "took off" during his career and kept him from reaching some of his goals. He stated that kids with the love for the game owe it to themselves and the game to do everything they can to get better and go as far as they can go in the game of baseball.

Bottom line: **Dedicate yourself to your sport!** You will be amazed with the results.

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### **Quotes for thought...**

*"In order to excel, you must be completely dedicated to your chosen sport. You must also be prepared to work hard and be willing to accept constructive criticism. Without 100% dedication, you won't be able to do this."*

*"Dedication is not what others expect of you, it is what you can give to others."*

### **Please write a short answer for these questions.**

- 1) Have you set expectations of yourself? If so, what are they? If not, take a few moments to think about some expectations for yourself, and write them down.
- 2) Are you dedicated? If the answer is yes, how so? If the answer is no, why not?

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# RESPONSIBILITY

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**You can't control what happens to you but you can control your reaction to it.** You have to take **RESPONSIBILITY** for how you respond to both negative and positive outcomes that are simply outside of your control.

The following is a list of what your responsibilities include:

1.) Having a clearly defined “mission” while you are playing and practicing.

2.) Playing the game one pitch at a time.

- a. Be in control of yourself.
- b. Have a plan or purpose on each pitch.
- c. Trust yourself.

3.) Focus on the process rather than the outcome.

- a. Much easier said than done, one must learn to focus on the process of playing the game and not the individual results that come from your efforts.
- b. Example: Focus on the process of fielding a ground ball the correct way; if you miss the ball do not focus on missing the ball focus on how you came to miss the ball.

4.) Develop your mental skills.

- a. You need to develop some key mental skills if you are going to discover just how good a ballplayer you can be.
- b. These skills can include:
  - i. Deep breath
  - ii. Mental imagery
  - iii. Self-talk
  - iv. Pre-performance routines
  - v. Goal setting (daily, monthly, seasonally, etc.)

5.) Make a commitment to learning.

- a. Make a commitment to learning something new every day or every time you are on the baseball field.
- b. Get in the habit of constructively evaluating each of your performances.
- c. Make sure every time you practice it is a quality session. You must practice a skill if you want to learn it. Practicing it the correct way allows you to master that skill.

# ATTITUDES

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**ATTITUDE: OUR STATE OF MIND AS WE APPROACH AND EXPERIENCE OUR LIVES.**

Quite simply, our attitude is **E-V-E-R-Y-T-H-I-N-G**. It governs how we do what we do.

This story about the attitudes of three major league players illustrates this point:

Three major league ball players walk onto the field together before a game. They are similar players as far as talent is when it comes to playing the game, but each has his own attitude and reason for playing the game.

Player "A" is playing the game only so that he can collect a pay check and provide money for his family. The money he gets paid for playing provides food, clothing and a home for his family and for himself.

Player "B" plays for approval. He wants to be appreciated. Few people ever get to be big leaguers and he enjoys being envied. He is going to make the fans love him today. A couple of hits, a dinger, maybe and he did sign a bunch of autographs earlier.

Player "C" flat out loves the game. He loves to compete. He wants to win but understands that if he doesn't there will be another game tomorrow. He has a great time being on a team and is very content with his place on the team.

All three players play the game for different reasons and all of them have different attitudes towards the game.

Answer this to yourself...What is your attitude when you step on the field?

**A POOR ATTITUDE NEVER BRINGS ABOUT ANY POSITIVE RESULTS. THEREFORE, WHY PLAY WITH A POOR ATTITUDE?**

So, what does it take to change a poor attitude to a good one?

- 1.) Become aware of your existing attitudes.
- 2.) Try to understand why you have that attitude.
- 3.) Recognize the importance of learning. (No one knows everything)
- 4.) Dedicate yourself to working hard to get better.
- 5.) Be enthusiastic about your daily activities.
- 6.) Be open to change.
- 7.) Show your sense of humor.
- 8.) You should want to make friends with your teammates.
- 9.) Try to understand other's points of view.
- 10.) Be a good listener.
- 11.) Play effectively as a team.
- 12.) Do not criticize others.

Now, Is this easy to do? No not at all. But by just trying to change your attitude is a sign that positive results will follow.

**Attitudes are not really emotions. They are thoughts and actions in which you can control.**

An attitude can change or be changed. WE ARE NEVER STUCK FOR LIFE WITH AN ATTITUDE THAT WE DO NOT WANT. But it is up to you to decide if you are going to change a poor attitude into a positive attitude.

QUITE SIMPLY: **A POSITIVE** attitude normally brings about **POSITIVE** results. And as you would think a **NEGATIVE** attitude brings about **NEGATIVE** results.

What does this mean for you? If you are at the plate think that you are going hit the ball...you most likely will. If you are in the field on defense be positive that you are going to make the play and get the out.

**Answer these questions in short written form...**

- 1) Being honest, have you been the teammate who has been negative towards yourself, teammates, coaches, or umpires? If yes, how did this attitude impact your play, your teammates play, your coaches ability to focus on the game, and the umpires call making? If no, reread the attitude section again and answer the question...
- 2) What would your teammates say about your attitude? Would you be considered the team leader or the team crusher with your attitude?
- 3) Who can control your attitude? Will you work on having a positive attitude?

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# CONFIDENCE

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*Frank Simmons is on fire. He's been hitting everything hard for the last couple of games. He looks totally relaxed at the plate: calm and focused. "I'm seeing the ball real well right now," he tells his teammates, who know that's probably the understatement of the year. The ball looks both big and slow to Frank which gives him plenty of time to decide on each pitch; there's no way the ball is going to go past him at the plate. His mind is clear in the batter's box. He's not thinking; he's just an unstoppable hitting machine, oblivious to everything around him. He simply sees the ball and hits it. Frank can't wait for his next at-bat because hitting is easy, his swing is effortless. In short, Frank is in the "zone."*

As mentioned before, the goal of a strong mental game is to play with **CONFIDENCE**. Baseball is a mentally difficult game because every player must face so much adversity and failure. Through this adversity and failure it's all too easy to lose your self control. When you lose your self control confidence is easily lost. ***YOU MUST BE IN CONTROL OF YOURSELF BEFORE YOU CAN CONTROL YOUR PERFORMANCE.***

To stay in control you must be able to keep your confidence. A confident player has strong positive thoughts and images running through his head. When he's thinking about baseball, he sees himself playing well and making great plays. He makes comments to himself like, "I'm going to rip this pitch," "nothing gets by me," "I will fire this ball to first base."

You can observe the best players by the way they move, the presence they have. They look calm and in control. They seem free of fear, tension, worry, doubt and stress. **Players not in control display or internalize emotions that are negative and can display themselves in negative physical traits such as displeased faces (tears, anger, madness, doubt), slouched shoulders, slow movement with hesitation, etc. These are all OBSTACLES that will get in the way of performance.** **The important thing to remember is that whether you ARE or ARE NOT IN CONTROL of yourself both are a result of YOUR OWN THINKING!** Your mind means well; it wants to help, but it often gets in the way and keeps your body from performing at its peak...especially if your mind is unskilled.

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### Quotes for thought...

*"It took me a long time not to judge myself through someone else's eyes."*

*"Success comes in cans, not can not."*

*"You have brains in your head.*

*You have feet in your shoes.*

*You can steer yourself in any direction you choose.*

*You're on your own.*

*And you know what you know.*

*You are the guy who'll decide where to go."*

*"Confidence is preparation. Everything else is beyond your control."*

### **Answer the following questions in short written form...**

- 1) Do you show confidence or do you show a lack of confidence through your emotions, body language, or facial expressions?
- 2) Do you react to coaches pointing out a area of needed work with an open mind or a closed mind?

# LEARNING

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**FIRST OFF, WE HAVE TO MENTION THAT NO ONE KNOWS EVERYTHING! THE SOONER YOU REALIZE YOU NEED TO LEARN MORE TO BE A BETTER BASEBALL PLAYER THE FASTER YOU WILL GROW AS A BALL PLAYER.**

There is always a need to learn. We want to use our minds. We want to be persistent. Remember that mistakes are your **"first steps"** in learning...they are NOT failures...they are just part of the process of learning. Many people don't want to learn new things because they don't want to "look bad" in front of their friends, which is ridiculous, and no one is perfect! You will feel awkward or uncomfortable in times of learning; this is normal and will go away as you learn the skill or fundamental. I repeat, there is ALWAYS a need to learn no matter how old or how good you are.

THE STEPS FOR LEARNING:

- 1.) Never be satisfied with your knowledge, performance, or skill.
- 2.) Think and talk the solution, not the problem.
- 3.) Keep your emotions under control.
- 4.) Have an open mind.
- 5.) Use failures to learn.
- 6.) Be persistent.

WHEN WE FAIL TO LEARN, WE LEARN TO FAIL.

***Answer question in short written answer...***

1) Do you learn from your mistakes, or do you try to pretend you don't care because you are embarrassed?

# PREPARATION

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## **PREPARATION IS THE ACTION AND REPETITION OF LEARNING.**

In order to build confidence you need to practice the skill needed to complete the task. What do we mean by this? Well, if you want to be able to hit a baseball you have to first learn to swing a bat, if you want to field a ground ball you have to learn the mechanics of catching a ground ball, and if you want to be able to pitch the ball over the plate you must learn the physical steps required to throw a baseball.

So why not prepare yourself to be successful at whatever you do? This might require you to practice learning that skill over and over again until you can repeat that skill without limitations.

Effective preparation includes and brings out a number of mental elements such as: dedication, goal setting, and responsibility to name a few. We guarantee that if you put something into baseball you will get something out of it.

## **FAILURE TO PREPARE IS PREPARING TO FAIL.**

*“Success always comes when preparation meets opportunity”*

*“If you are not practicing, somebody else is, somewhere, and he'll be ready to take your position.”*

*“I have yet to be in a game where luck was involved. Well-prepared players make plays. I have yet to be in a game where the most prepared team didn't win.”*

### **Answer in written form...**

1) Do you prepare properly in order to succeed?

2) When stretching, warming up, and doing drills, are you giving 100% or just going through the motions?

3) Give an example of when not preparing properly can lead to failure.

# VIZUALIZATION / IMAGERY

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Visualization or imagery is using your senses to create or recreate experiences in your mind. This can help your ability to play as your mind does not do a good job of distinguishing between what is real and what is imagined; the information is processed in similar ways. Have you ever had a dream while you were sleeping and when you woke up you thought the dream was real? That is how strong the mind can be. Think of how powerful this can be if you visualize real-time positive outcomes. Imagine that what you visualize or imagine can come true because the mind believes it to be true!

## **HITTING IMAGERY IDEAS:**

- Recall times when hitting seemed easy. See and feel yourself knock base hits all over the park. Remember how big the ball looked and hear the sound of the ball hitting the fat part of the bat. Feel the confidence you felt on those special times.
- See yourself having great at-bats against your upcoming opponent. Image hitting: remind yourself of what your plan is and see yourself executing it perfectly.
- Imagine yourself going through batting practice. Feel yourself being in a good mood...having fun and hitting the ball hard. See yourself bringing this to the game. You are going to hit the same way. You are going to pound the ball!

## **FIELDING IMAGERY IDEAS:**

- Recall defensive plays that you have made in the past. Think of some of the best plays you have ever made. Relive them in as much detail as possible.
- Image yourself cleanly making plays against your next opponent. Feel yourself go through your fielding actions with excellent mechanics.
- Hear yourself say hit it to me. Know what to do with the ball before it ever gets hit to you. You are prepared. You have confidence. You will make the play.

***Take 5 minutes and practice visualizing. You will answer me when I ask about this at practice.***

# SELF-TALK

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What do you say to yourself when you play baseball? Because of all the failure in baseball, a lot of players spend a great deal of time talking negatively to themselves. Your self-talk is something you need to be aware of. Most importantly though, make sure you choose to talk to yourself in an ENCOURAGING, CONFIDENCE-ENHANCING way. In short talk to yourself the way you would talk to your best friend.

## What should you say to yourself on the baseball field?

### IN GENERAL

- "I am in control of myself before each pitch."
- "I am taking one pitch at a time."
- "I am focused on each pitch."
- "I have paid my dues and I trust my ability."
- "I trust myself to make the play."

### HITTING

- "I am a smart and strong hitter."
- "I am seeing the ball well and driving it hard."
- "Trust my hands."
- "See the ball, hit the ball."
- "Attack the ball."
- "Hit it hard."
- "Be aggressive."
- "Use the hands."
- "Put the fat part of the bat on the ball."
- "Hit it in the gaps."

### FIELDING

- "Right, left, ready."
- "Hit it to me."
- "I can make any play."
- "I'm smooth."
- "Stay down on the ball."
- "Quick as a cat."
- "Fast to the ball."
- "Quick release."

## **HOW DOES IT HELP ME TO SAY THINGS THAT I MIGHT NOT BELIEVE?**

Sometimes, when you're feeling really low, saying confident statements to yourself like "I'm a great player" might sound laughable. There are a couple of reasons to do it anyway:

- 1.) It starts you in the right direction. The best players take responsibility for their own thinking; they choose what to think rather than letting the situation dictate to them what they should think.
- 2.) Even if you don't "believe" what you are saying to yourself, making the effort to say positive things directs your focus and keeps you from saying anything negative. Thus, it gives you your best chance at being confident and performing great.

### **Tips for Self-Talk:**

- Keep the self-talk as positive as possible.
- Keep your self-talk in the moment. Like "What do I need to do now?", instead of beating yourself up over an error or bad play.
- Make sure the last thought in your head before each pitch is positive and directs your focus to the task at hand.

# CONCENTRATION

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## **OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE REQUIRES OUTSTANDING CONCENTRATION!**

Concentration is best defined as the ability to focus your attention on the task at hand. In baseball, the focus is a target: a ball, a spot to throw to, a movement, paying attention to the batter as the ball is being pitched to him.

The good thing about baseball is that you only have to concentrate for 4-8 seconds at a time. For example, you concentrate as the pitcher is winding up-the ball is thrown-the batter swings-the ball is hit-the defender makes the play. You can relax and think of what you will need to do on the next pitch. Before the start of the next pitch you fully concentrate again. The process continues over and over, but it is all done in small chunks of time.

The good news for you is that CONCENTRATION is a skill and can be learned. It may be true that some players are better at concentrating than others but those that are not great at being able to concentrate can learn to do so. Player's can train themselves to focus on the task at hand and to not be distracted by random thoughts that have nothing to do with the situation of the game they are in.

### **4 GOLDEN RULES OF CONCENTRATION:**

- 1.) FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE, not the negative.
- 2.) FOCUS ON THE PRESENT, not the past.
- 3.) FOCUS ON THE PROCESS/EXECUTION, not the result.
- 4.) FOCUS ON THE TARGET! (Ball, glove, bat)

# MENTAL DISCIPLINE

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## WE CAN CONTROL OUR THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS.

MENTAL DISCIPLINE is the ability to concentrate on a task that needs to be accomplished successfully. For example, seeing/hitting the ball and seeing the target/throwing the pitch are examples where you need to have the mental discipline to concentrate on the task at hand.

Hopefully you have learned what we want to do and how we want to do it from this. Now you are going to discipline yourself to do it. Over and over again. Despite pressure and pain. Despite adversity and failure. We reject pressure rather than accepting it. We control pain, rather than being controlled by it. We grow through adversity. We become motivated by failure. We control ourselves.

Mental games are won through being aware of what our goal is, knowing what it takes to achieve it and dedicating ourselves to making it happen.

### **OBSTACLES TO MENTAL DISCIPLINE**

- 1.) Emotional Swings
- 2.) Negative Thinking
- 3.) Pressure
- 4.) Slumps
- 5.) Anger

## RECIPES FOR OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES TO MENTAL DISCIPLINE

### Emotional Swings

YOU NEED TO BE BALANCED TO FIGHT EMOTIONAL SWINGS!

Trying harder when things are going poorly may be a good sign of character, but it is NOT the right way to improve your performance. **The player who maintains the same, solid approach** regardless of adversity or good fortune, best controls himself and the situation.

He is the “real,” gamer because he lets nothing take him from his game plan. He lets nothing throw his emotions off balance. He comes through in the clutch, because he knows what he wants to do always: which is to maintain control.

He is the “steady” ballplayer.  
He grinds it out day after day, situation after situation.  
He keeps his “chin” up.

### Negative Thinking

YOU NEED TO THINK POSITIVE THOUGHTS

Most people are aware of the “power of positive thinking,” but few realize that consistent thinking patterns prior to performance are essential to consistent peak performance. The great player’s control their thinking; the poor ones are controlled by theirs. Thinking patterns can be controlled.

Controlling your thinking pattern:

1. What are you thinking?
2. How are you thinking? Positive or negative?
3. Think about a positive thought.
4. Focus on that thought.
5. Envision yourself succeeding.
6. Repeat this positive thought.

### Pressure

PRESSURE CAN BE REAL OR IMAGINARY OBSTACLES.

Remember ALL obstacles can be removed. At least real obstacles can. Imaginary obstacles, imaginary problems, slow us the most and cause the most frustration. Please realize that most pressure is put on **you by YOU**. So if you are the one pressuring yourself it is most likely a sign of lack of confidence in yourself. If you do not have faith in performing then you are most likely not prepared to perform the task. Learn to recognize pressure as a challenge. You should take the challenge and welcome it. Perform the challenge successfully and the pressure starts to go away.

How do you get past pressure? Fill your thought with positive self-talk, successful outcomes and effective breathing.

- 1.) Getting away from the source of the pressures
  - a. Leave the batter’s box
  - b. Step off the mound
  - c. Turn your back on home plate in the field

## 2.) Moving/Stretching

- a. Make movements that are the same as when you are relaxed
- b. Stretch slowly
- c. Rub out the dirt with your cleats
- d. Take some practice swings

## 3.) Visualizing

- a. See yourself relaxing
- b. Think of something that relaxes you (fishing, playing video games, resting)

## 4.) Tensing up and then relaxing

- a. Tense your body for 5 seconds and then completely let go...relax

## 5.) Talk out loud

- a. Give yourself a positive message
- b. Speak in soft, relaxed tones at a slow pace

## 6.) Controlled breathing

- a. Breathe in slowly until the lungs are comfortably full
- b. Hold for a couple of seconds
- c. Let the air out slowly and completely come out without forcing it

## Slumps

SLUMPS AND STREAKS ARE A PART OF THE GAME, BUT WHAT ARE THEY!

Do not judge a slump by statistics! The quality of your at-bats and your fielding technique tell you if there is a mechanical flaw. Most “slumps” are caused by a lack of concentration. We will define a real “slump” as an extended breakdown in a player’s typical approach, which can be in hitting, pitching, or fielding. A poor approach leads to a non-typical performance. The player who worries about a slump can cause the slump to last longer.

To get out of a slump if you are a:

HITTER

- 1.) Concentrate on seeing the ball.
- 2.) Drive the ball up the middle.
- 3.) Don’t try to over swing!
- 4.) Keep things simple...do not rush yourself.
- 5.) Swing at pitches you can hit. Let the bad pitches go by.
- 6.) Control your emotional level with breathing and positive thoughts.

## PITCHER

- 1.) Concentrate on seeing the target.
- 2.) Know the situation and the opposition.
- 3.) Have a purpose with every pitch.
- 4.) Control your emotional level with breathing and positive thoughts.
- 5.) Warm up properly.

## Anger

**AN ANGRY PLAYER IS MOST OFTEN A FRUSTRATED PLAYER!**

*“Anger always comes from frustrated expectations”*

A player becomes angry after striking out, or throwing a home run pitch, or booting a ground ball in a key situation. The frustration of “not having things go our way” can lead to anger, unless we’ve learned to control our disappointment and control our actions, instead of acting with childish emotions.

To beat your anger you need to stay “COOL”. The cool players have learned, through mental discipline, to control and channel their energy into something positive.

Think of this. “Anger is like a wind that blows out the candle of the brain and a good player can’t perform in the dark. So a good player never lets the wind of anger blow out the light!” – old proverb

**WRITE A PARAGRAPH OR TWO DETAILING THE OBSTACLES YOU FACE WHEN IT COMES TO MENTAL DISCIPLINE. THEN WRITE SOME STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO CONTROL THOSE EMOTIONS, THOUGHTS, ETC IN ORDER TO STAY FOCUSED AND COOL...**



# RELAXATION

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Two of the main ideas presented in this paper are the importance of being in control of yourself to control your performance, and practicing what you will be doing in a game. RELAXATION TRAINING PULLS THESE IDEAS TOGETHER. Specifically, relaxation training provides an opportunity to practice controlling yourself in a comfortable environment allowing you to better control yourself in an “uncomfortable” environment, such as a game.

## **Here is how you can train yourself to relax:**

- 1.) First lie on your back
- 2.) Take three deep breaths. Focus on the air as it enters and leaves your abdomen.
- 3.) Move through your body and tense the muscles (listed below) for five seconds.
- 4.) After the muscles have been tense for 5 seconds please release the tension and allow the body to be completely relaxed.
- 5.) Finally, take a deep breath, focus on how warm and relaxed that body part is that you just tensed and relaxed.
- 6.) Do some visualization when you are in a relaxed state. Imagine yourself making great plays in the field, at the plate and running the bases.
- 7.) When done take time to enjoy the relaxed state you are in while maintaining your focus on your breathing and the feelings in your body.
- 8.) Do these steps for your: right leg, left leg, buttocks, chest and stomach, your back, right arm and fist, left arm and fist, shoulders, and face.

## **Relaxation benefits you in four major ways:**

- 1.) **You learn to control yourself.**
  - a. Because relaxing causes you to focus on your body and breathing your awareness of what is going on inside you is increased.
  - b. It provides the opportunity to get rid of unwanted tension.
- 2.) **Your ability to concentrate is enhanced.**
  - a. It helps you overcome distractions by focusing on your body and breathing.
  - b. Learning to maintain your focus during relaxation will help your focus during a game.
- 3.) **The mind is quieted for enhanced imagery.**
  - a. When you are relaxed the noise in your mind caused by tension and random thoughts is quieted.
  - b. This allows more vivid images from your focus.
  - c. You can imagine more clearly when you are focused.
- 4.) **You gain physiological benefits.**
  - a. It lowers your heart and breathing rates.
  - b. It lowers your blood pressure.

# TAKE CONTROL

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This section deals with two ideas on control which form the foundation for playing baseball one pitch at a time:

- 1.) You can't control what happens around you, but you can control how you choose to respond.

**WRITE THE ABOVE SENTENCE 10 TIMES ON A PIECE OF PAPER.**

- 2.) You must be in control of yourself before you can control your performance.

**WRITE THE ABOVE SENTENCE 10 TIMES ON A PIECE OF PAPER.**

Let's cover the first one: "You can't control what happens around you, but you can control how you choose to respond."

Things you CAN'T control:

- an umpire's call
- the crowd
- the weather
- you getting a hit
- field conditions
- your teammates' performances
- your coach
- the other team's ability
- luck

**REFLECT...WHAT CAN'T YOU CONTROL? WRITE DOWN ALL THE THINGS ABOVE THAT YOU CAN'T CONTROL, THAN, GO BACK TO THE 1<sup>ST</sup> SENTANCE YOU WROTE 10 TIMES AND WRITE IT UNDERNEATH THE THINGS YOU CAN'T CONTROL.**

**Things you CAN control:**

- your ATTITUDE
- your EFFORT
- your THOUGHTS
- your EMOTIONS

**NOW, WRITE THESE FOUR THINGS YOU CAN CONTROL DOWN UNDERNEATH.**

When you waste energy worrying about what is NOT under your control or when you waste time worrying about a past mistake/error you are taking away energy needed to focus on your present performance. Do not play in the present with your brain looking back in the past. And never worry about the future. Play in the present with positive thoughts and imagery.

One of the great things about being human is the ability to think independently of our surroundings. YOU CAN CHOOSE HOW YOU RESPOND TO ANY SITUATION ON OR OFF THE FIELD!!! For instance, at any time you can choose to recall your greatest hits or your best plays in the field. Do this for a few moments and you will start to feel good about yourself.

THE BEST PLAYERS SPEND A LOT OF TIME THINKING ABOUT PLAYING WELL. IN FACT, CHOOSING TO THINK ABOUT PLAYING WELL PLAYS A PART IN THESE PLAYERS' SUCCESS. What does this mean? THEY PLAY GREAT BECAUSE THEY THINK ABOUT PLAYING GREAT!!!

So, what you choose to think about determines how you will play, so choose what you think about wisely. CHOOSE TO THINK ABOUT PLAYING WELL!!!

Now let's cover the second one: "You must be in control of yourself before you can control your performance."

Gene Mauch, former major league manager said it best when he said, **"A pitcher can't control his pitches unless he's in control of himself."**

Are you ready for this? **Most guys lose control of themselves before they lose control of their mechanics.** When a player breaks down mechanically early in a game or tight situation, it usually isn't because of fatigue. **Their mechanics break down because they have lost control of themselves.** They panic, even at the major-league level. **It can be caused by anything from an umpire blowing a call, an error made by them or a teammate, another team playing well, etc.** Most times you can see their mechanics break down: *they pull their head on ground balls, they make bad throws, don't move as fast, they get too cautious with their body movement. These are all losses of mental control.*

## **THIS COULD BE THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF ALL**

**Developing the ability to control yourself in the heat of battle is an essential component of playing heads-up baseball. When you are in control all other aspects of playing well, such as making good decisions and using your best mechanics, become easier. The player who is under control is playing the game one pitch at a time. He's not upset about something that happened on a previous pitch or worried what might happen on a future pitch. His focus is on the present pitch. That's where he has control. What is the process for being in control of myself?**

### **TAKE A DEEP BREATH. FOCUS. BE PRESENT. WHY?**

- 1.) It puts focus on the present moment!
- 2.) It enables you to "check in" with yourself to see if you are in control.
- 3.) It helps you get control of yourself.
- 4.) It helps release the negatives in your body and mind.
- 5.) It can energize you when you are feeling sluggish.
- 6.) It helps you shift your thought to a state of trusting yourself.
- 7.) It can help you establish rhythm by taking a breath before each pitch.

**WHAT CAN YOU START DOING TO STAY IN CONTROL? WRITE A SENTENCE OR TWO EXPLANATION...**

# THE WINNING WAY

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*“Winning is not a sometime thing, it is an all-the-time thing. You don’t win once in a while. You don’t do things right once in a while. You do them right all the time.”*

*Vince Lombardi – Hall of Fame NFL Coach*

Striving for excellence is how the player plans to be able to win. It is first in the player’s mind and then in his actions. Sports have shown us that the idea of winning, put into action, will lead to winning. **THE RIGHT RESULTS COME FROM THE RIGHT APPROACH!**

When you know the right way to do something and you know you want to do it that way, there is no acceptable reason to make any other choice. If you want success prepare for success. And by putting this into action you are already a winner! 😊

Check this out.

## **WINNERS MAKE THE CHOICE**

- ...to get something out of all situations instead of complaining about them!
- ...to hustle rather than be lazy!
- ...to be prepared rather than just show up!
- ...to be early, rather than on-time, or worse, late!
- ...to want to learn, rather than give excuses!
- ...to do more, rather than just enough or less!
- ...to be mentally tough, rather than mentally lazy, intimidated or weak!
- ...to be aggressive, rather than passive or submissive!
- ...to know their limitations, rather than to try to do more than they’re capable of!
- ...to think about solutions, rather than worry about problems!
- ...to accept adversity as part of the game, rather than magnify the adverse conditions and seek sympathy!
- ...to share with other, rather than be selfish!
- ...to think and act positively, rather than negatively!

Or try this...

## **A SCOREBOARD FOR A WINNER**

- A WINNER FOCUSES. A loser doesn’t.
- WHEN A WINNER MAKES A MISTAKE HE SAYS, “MY FAULT.” When a loser makes a mistake, he says, “it wasn’t my fault.”
- A WINNER ISN’T AFRAID OF LOSING AS NEAR AS MUCH as a loser is afraid of winning.
- A WINNER WORKS HARD. A loser doesn’t.
- A WINNER GOES THROUGH A PROBLEM. A loser goes around it.

- A WINNER SHOWS HE'S SORRY FOR HIS MISTAKE BY MAKING UP FOR IT. A loser says, "I'm sorry," but does the same thing the next time.
- A WINNER LEARNS FROM HIS MISTAKES. A loser learns only not to make mistakes by not trying anything differently.
- A WINNER SAYS, "I'M GOOD, BUT I'M NOT AS GOOD AS I OUGHT TO BE." A loser says "I'm not as bad as a lot of other people."
- A WINNER LISTENS. A loser just waits for his turn to talk.
- A WINNER IS SENSITIVE TO WHAT IS GOING ON AROUND HIM. A loser is sensitive to his own feelings.
- A WINNER PACES HIMSELF. A loser has two speeds, hysterical and sluggish.

**WHAT ARE YOU NOT DOING THAT IS IMPACTING YOU FROM BEING A "WINNER"? NOT A WINNER OF GAMES OR TROPHYS, BUT A TRUE WINNER AS A PLAYER/PERSON? WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO CHANGE? FULL PAGE RESPONSE REQUIRED HERE. GIVE THIS A LOT OF THOUGHT...**

# DEALING WITH FAILING AND LOSING

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You will experience failure. Baseball is a game of failure; the only way to avoid it is to not play. Even the best players make outs, boot ground balls, walk in winning runs, drop game-losing fly balls, strike out with the bases loaded, go into slumps and have bad seasons.

THE QUESTION ISN'T WHETHER YOU WILL FACE ADVERSITY BUT HOW YOU WILL RESPOND TO IT. THERE IS NO VALUE IN DWELLING ON FAILURE but it must be recognized as part of the game. We don't see this as negative thinking, we see it as reality.

*"There is too much at stake to spend time being upset. You must develop the ability to learn from what just happened, then forgive yourself for doing it and forget that it happened. Learn, forgive and forget: once you have done this, you have done all you can do."*

– Dr. Curt Tribble, Heart Surgeon

***Striving for perfection is admirable, but perfection as a measure of success is dangerous!***

Players often tie themselves into knots if they don't get a hit every time up or fail to hit their target with each pitch. **Giving yourself permission to make mistakes frees you from worrying about them.** The more free you feel, the more likely you are to play your best.

***Learn from it. Failure is feedback. Step back from your failure and examine it as someone else might see it.*** Pretend it happened to your best friend on the team. What would you say to him?

**DISTANCING YOURSELF FROM THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF FAILING MAKES IT MUCH EASIER TO LEARN THE IMPORTANT LESSONS FROM IT.** Finally,

ask yourself, "How can this experience help me become a better player?"

**TAKE A FEW MINS TO REFLECT ON FAILURES YOU HAVE MADE. WRITE DOWN 1 FAILURE, AND WHAT YOU WOULD TELL YOURSELF TO LEARN FROM IT.**

# HITTING

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## **“IN-THE-HOLE” and “ON-DECK”**

- 1.) Get ready. Put on batting gloves. Get your helmet.
- 2.) Get your body ready.
- 3.) Study the pitches.
- 4.) Get clear on your plan.
- 5.) Pretend you are at bat.
- 6.) Remind yourself of any mechanical points that your coaches work with you on.
- 7.) Visualize the pitches coming in and you taking perfect swings at them driving the ball hard.
- 8.) Take a deep breath. Check your body for tension. Release any tension you have.
- 9.) Take some practice swings.
- 10.) Take another deep breath and stand tall; make sure you have good posture.
- 11.) Take some more practice swings.
- 12.) Walk to the plate with focus, concentration and confidence!

## **AT THE PLATE**

Your preparation is wasted if your focus and trust in yourself are lost when you are at the plate. Here are some things you can do just outside the box or as you step in to get yourself where you want to be – confident and focused.

- 1.) Take a breath.
- 2.) Remind yourself of your plan. “Hit it hard up the middle.”
- 3.) Combine a deep breath with a cue word or phrase. For example, take a deep breath and think “hands back, knees bent and bug squish” or “see the ball hit the ball.”
- 4.) Smooth the dirt in the batter’s box with your foot before you step in, wiping away all the negative thoughts, any previous bad at bats, and all the other players mistakes in the batter’s box before you.
- 5.) Focus on the fat part of the bat. That is where you will hit it.
- 6.) Look at your focal point (where the ball is being released.)
- 7.) When the ball is pitched let your hard work and preparation take over.
- 8.) Crush the ball!
- 9.) If the pitch is not a good pitch or you swing and miss...please take another deep breath between pitches and repeat steps #1 thru #8. You will hit the ball.

# FIELDING

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Defensively speaking you are not helping your team if you give the other team a run with your glove for every run you drive in with you bat.

The challenge of fielding is to be focused and confident on each pitch. In other words, play the game one pitch at a time just as you would if you were pitching or hitting. There will be times when this comes easily for you, but there also will be plenty of times when you aren't totally focused on playing defense.

**WHEN YOU ARE PLAYING DEFENSE, YOU WANT TO BE IN A PEAK PERFORMANCE ZONE, NOT THE "TWILIGHT ZONE."**

When you are focused and in control of yourself before a pitch you not only get the best ump you can on the ball, but keeping your composure while making the play is less difficult. The game seems to move along at a comfortable pace. When you are in control of yourself before the play, your chances of staying in control during the play are greatly enhanced.

If you haven't focused or are spiraling out of control before a pitch, not only do you fail to get a good jump on a ball hit your way, but you also are more likely to panic when a ball is on its way to you. If you feel surprised when the ball is hit to you or everything seems to be in fast forward you probably are not playing one pitch at a time.

**IT'S SO EASY FOR YOUR MIND TO WANDER THAT YOUR REAL OPPONENT ISN'T ALWAYS THE OTHER TEAM... THE REAL ENEMY IS BOREDOM!** You must have total focus on every pitch.

**FIELDING REQUIRES A MIND-SET THAT SAYS "HIT IT TO ME!"** When you want the ball you anticipate what you will do when the ball is hit to you; you are confident, focused, in control and move to the ball in an aggressive but relaxed way. Our discussion of fielding therefore, centers on helping you consistently want the ball to be hit to you.

Let's go back to the start of this discussion...what do you want your reputation as a fielder to be? More importantly, **WHAT MUST YOU DO TO EARN THE REPUTATION YOU WANT AS A FIELDER? ANSWER THIS QUESTION IN A PARAGRAPH.**

Great performers in any field love what they do, at least in some way. If you are passionate about something, you not only do it often, but with focus and intensity. In short, you do it with purpose.

### **PRE-PITCH ROUTINE**

- 1.) Take a breath. This breath will help you get control and keep your focus.
- 2.) Say a short word or phrase to yourself, i.e. “hit it to me!” or “all mine!”
- 3.) Pound your fist into your glove once or twice.
- 4.) Take a RIGHT STEP and then a LEFT STEP and now you are READY.
- 5.) Take your throwing hand and press in on your web to widen your glove.
- 6.) With knees slightly bent you are now ready to succeed.

### **FIELDING IMAGERY IDEAS**

- 1.) Recall defensive plays that you have made in the past!
- 2.) Think of the three best plays you have ever made!
- 3.) Relive them in great detail!
- 4.) Imagine yourself cleanly making plays against your next opponent!
- 5.) Feel yourself go through your fielding actions with excellent mechanics!

### **KNOW WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU MAKE AN ERROR**

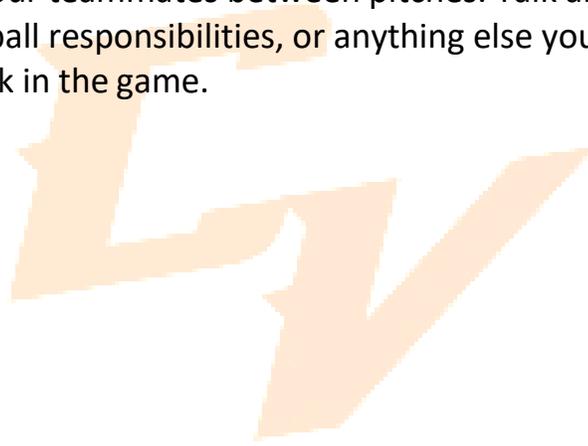
Once you have a pre-pitch routine, you now need a plan for handling when you make an error. Errors are a part of the game. I don't want to you to spend a lot of time thinking about making errors, but I do want you to be prepared to hand them. You need to get a strategy to release the emotions that come with making an error. Having a plan for dealing with errors is not negative thinking, it's thinking ahead.

Keep this in mind college coaches and pro scouts often hope players they scout make an error or face some other adversity so they can see how the player handles it. Can he overcome adversity or does he lose control when he makes one mistake or has a bad at bat? The answer often determines whether or not a player is recruited or drafted.

### **HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR PLAN TO GET PAST ERRORS**

- 1.) Take a breath. Take a couple of breaths and make sure your muscles relax.
- 2.) Use your focal point. Go back to trusting yourself on the next pitch. Restart.
- 3.) Take off your glove or hat. When the glove or hat is off you can be disgusted...when the glove or hat go back on, however, it means you are ready to focus on the next pitch.

- 4.) Turn your back to the plate. You can be upset when your back is to the plate but when you turn around everything is positive and focused on determining your plan for the next pitch.
- 5.) Smooth things over. Wipe smooth a foot print in the dirt with your foot to clear away the last play. It is done and erased. On to the next pitch.
- 6.) Pick up some grass or a rock. Squeeze the object and put all your negative energy into it. When you are ready, throw the object and your negative emotions away.
- 7.) Lift your chest high. Lift your head. Carry yourself like a pro. Good posture helps with good thoughts. Be confident!
- 8.) Talk to your teammates between pitches. Players often get “internal” when they are down. Don’t use the time between pitches to let yourself get down...talk to your teammates between pitches. Talk about coverages, positioning, fly ball responsibilities, or anything else you can think of to get your energy back in the game.



# BASERUNNING

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## **“HEADS-UP” BASERUNNING WINS GAMES**

Many games are decided because an alert base runner took one extra base which led to one extra run which meant the difference between winning or losing.

Base running just isn't about speed. Speed is great if you have it, but if you don't have quickness in your legs you can still be an excellent base runner by being quick with your mind. Getting a good jump on a base hit, knowing how to run on ball hit in the air, reading line drives and understanding what your options are regarding who in on base and what the situation is are all things that can assist you in becoming a great base runner.

You should have the right mind-set when running bases. The right mind-set is thinking “next base.” Good base runners aren't satisfied with getting a hit; their mission is to score a run! Whether it's going from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> on a single, scoring from first on a double, or moving from second to 3<sup>rd</sup> on a bunt, they're always looking for a way to take that “extra” base.

## **BE UNDER CONTROL**

The first step to running the bases one pitch at a time is to be under control. When you're under control you are able to anticipate what might happen on the next pitch and your mind is clear to make the split-second decisions necessary on the base paths. When you aren't under control you are tight both mentally and physically resulting in bad jumps on batted balls and bad decisions about at which base to stop. Some runners get so out of control they forget to look to the third base coach for the signs before the pitch or as they approach second base on a base hit! If you can't remember to look to your coach for signs, you aren't in control of yourself.

## **BASERUNNING STEPS ONCE YOU ARE ON BASE**

- 1.) Get excited about base running.
- 2.) Take a deep breath.
- 3.) Focus and respect every stride you are going to take.
- 4.) Know your situation and talk to yourself about what you are going to do if the ball is hit to different defensive players.
- 5.) Work on getting a good jump and reading the ball off of the bat.
- 6.) TRUST YOURSELF!!! 😊
- 7.) Set yourself apart – coaches like to see guys who care about getting better.

Write down a statement, print it out, and put it on your wall. The statement will be your go to for getting focused.

Here was mine through high school...

**"Others may be bigger, stronger, faster and more athletic than me, but no one...NOONE will outwork me. I will take my opponents to a level they will not go, and I WILL leave it all on the field."**