



HEADS UP BASEBALL: PLAYING ONE PITCH AT A TIME

Lesson 1: Have a Clearly Defined Mission.

What is a mission and why is it important?

1. **Your mission gives you direction and defines discipline.**
Heads up players are driven by values and a sense of purpose, not by how they are feeling that day.
2. **Your mission provides meaning.**
Gives you a purpose to stay focused on.
3. **Your mission minimizes stress.**
Knowing why you play baseball and what you want out of it gives you perspective. Baseball is something you do, not who you are. See the big picture.
4. **Your mission fuels intensity.**
Having something to focus on and strive for keeps you from just going through the motions.

Your mission:

- 1). **Why do you play baseball?**
- 2). **What type of player do you want to be?**
 - a). If you were told this would be your last season of playing baseball, what attitude would you choose to have each day?
 - b). What attitude displayed by other players impresses you most?
 - c). What moments have given you the greatest satisfaction in baseball? Why?
 - d). I'd like to be known as the type of player who:
- 3). **What would you like to accomplish in baseball?**
 - a). What are your dream goals for your baseball career?
 - b). What are your "realistic " goals for your career?
 - c). What are your goals for this season?
 - d). What are your goals for this month? Week?

To accomplish your goals: **BE PRESENT FOCUSED**. One practice, one pitch, one inning, one game, one day at a time.

In summary: A clear mission gives you perspective, direction, intensity, and meaning, and opens the door to you learning as much as possible. In addition, it helps avoid “*Going Through the Motions*” mindset that cripples many players and keeps them from finding out how good they can be. Develop a daily mission!

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Lesson 2: TAKING CONTROL

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

- a). The only thing you can control is yourself.
- b). Energy spent worrying about what is outside of your control takes away from the energy needed to focus on your performance.
- c). You can control how you respond to any situation on or off the field.
- d). Spend time thinking and visualizing playing well.
- e). Take responsibility for your thinking and choose to think effective, helpful thoughts in all situations rather than simply letting what goes on around you determine your thoughts and attitude.
- f). This is not an easy task. We live in a society that puts results ahead of everything. You can develop this mindset with practice.

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

- a). When you are in control of yourself you are composed, thinking clearly and confidently.
- b). If you aren't in control of your mind you can't control your body.
- c). Developing the ability to control yourself in the heat of battle is an essential component of slowing things down.
- d). The deep breathe helps you gain and keep self-control.

A good breath:

1. Puts your focus at the present moment.
2. Enables you to check in with yourself to see if you're in control.
3. Helps you get control.
4. Helps release negatives.
5. Energizes you when you are feeling sluggish.
6. Helps you shift from conscious thinking to unconscious trusting.
7. Helps establish a sense of rhythm in your pitching, hitting or fielding.

Final Thoughts:

1. Begin to put deep breathing into practice. During stretching, practice, etc.
2. Inhale through the nose, exhale through your mouth. Count to 10 as you inhale, count back to 1 as you exhale.
3. In a game, you need to concentrate fully on the next pitch so that all other thoughts are blocked out. Deep breathing helps develop that ability.

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Lesson 3: **Playing baseball one pitch at a time consists of three steps: having self-control, planning your performance, and trusting yourself.**

- 1. Self-Control.** You are the only thing in a ball game you can control, and you must be in control before you can control your performance. Become self-aware.
 - a). To help you understand awareness, think of it as a traffic light.
 1. When you are playing well your light is GREEN. You are in control.
 2. When you begin to have trouble, swing at a bad pitch, give up a hit, your YELLOW light comes on. You begin to rush, feel tense.
 3. When you're really struggling you hit your RED light. You've become tense, shaken, you think negative thoughts.
 - b). To get back into control use these tools:
 1. Recognize when you begin to lose control.
 2. Use your breathing technique.
 3. Take some time.
 4. Use a release. "Put negative thoughts and emotions in the TOILET.
 5. Pick a focal point. Could be the fence, scoreboard, something that helps refocus your thoughts.
 6. Carry yourself with confidence. Be aware of your body language.
- 2. Plan your performance.** Have a mission for each pitch. Make it simple and clear.
 - a). Commit to the plan. Know what you want to do and do it. Have conviction.
 - b). Visualize the plan. Seeing yourself executing your plan before the pitch is thrown strengthens your commitment and sharpens your concentration. Visualizing helps "block out" all other distractions.
- 3. Trust in yourself.**
 - a). Use your breathing to get in control.
 - b). Visualize your plan: "SEE IT, DO IT"
 - c). Use cue words. Effective cue words capture what you are trying to do and help you stay focused. Ex. "Stay back," "See the ball."
 - d). Use objects or pieces of equipment to trigger your focus. Ex. The rubber,

batter's box, bat, imaginary circle of concentration for fielders. The key is doing something that puts your focus outside of you. You trust your ability.

Nobody feels 100% all the time. That is one of baseball's major challenges. Even if you recognize your yellow and red lights, you've mastered the skills you need to get yourself under control, even if you have a clear plan for each pitch, you won't feel totally confident every time you play. **YOU'VE GOT TO TRUST WHAT YOU'VE GOT.** It is the player who knows what he does have and does the most with it is the one who wins the battle.

Assignment: Make a list of reasons you have to trust yourself. Reasons need to support the belief you are a mentally tough player. Be clear, specific, and detailed.

Examples of players playing one pitch at a time:

1. Hitter who feels good at the plate.

- SELF-CONTROL: He checks in and recognizes he feels good and he's confident he is going to drive the ball. That is a green light.
- PLAN: He gets his signals from 3rd base coach. Nothing is on. He says to himself, "See the ball, hit the ball."
- TRUST: He plants his back foot in the box, takes a deep breath sends his focus to the pitcher and the baseball.

2. Hitter who swings and misses at a curveball in the dirt.

- SELF-CONTROL: He recognizes he is over anxious at the plate. He steps out of box, takes a dry swing to get that last swing out of mind. He takes a deep breath to help regain control.
- PLAN: He gets his signals. Says to himself "See it, Hit it."
- TRUST: He gets in batter's box, takes a good breath, and focuses on the pitcher and baseball.

3. Pitcher who is throwing well.

- SELF-CONTROL: He can feel he's in a good rhythm and things are going well. That is a green light.
PLAN: he steps on the rubber and takes a deep breath. he gets his sign from the catcher: curveball, down and away. He commits to the pitch.
- TRUST: He sends his focus to the catcher's mitt, and throws the pitch.

4. Pitcher after giving up a home run.

- SELF-CONTROL: He recognizes he is upset. He walks off the mound to locate his "focal point", the scoreboard, which reminds him that pitch is over, it is in the past. He tells himself to relax and focus on the next pitch. He takes a good breath, turns around, and walks confidently back up on the rubber.
- PLAN: He steps onto the rubber and takes a deep breath. He then gets the sign from the catcher: Fastball, down and in. He commits to the pitch.
- TRUST: He directs his focus to his target, the catcher's mitt, and

throws the pitch.

These are few examples of how to play the game one pitch at a time. The skills discussed are critical to playing with confidence, composure, and consistency because it's what you do between pitches that determine what you do during the pitches. These strategies don't guarantee success, but they give you a routine that will help give you the best chance of being successful.

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Lesson 5: How to Work on Your Mental Game in Practice.

The quality of your practices determines your reactions to pressure situations. A quality practice involves doing things with the same intensity and focus you use in a game.

Thus: **PRACTICE WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO DO IN A GAME.**

Have a purpose or mission. In other words, know what you are trying to accomplish. Just as hitter's often give away at-bats because they aren't focused on each pitch, players often give away practices because they are just going through the motions.

- Look forward to practice. Know why you play.
- Leave your off the field concerns off the field. Focus on baseball for 2-3 hrs.
- Set a mission or two for the day.
- Understand the difference between putting in a quality, focused practice and just going through the motions.
- Quality practice is paying attention. It involves doing things with a purpose and in having your mind fully engaged in what you are doing **right now**.

MENTAL PREP FOR PRACTICE:

- 1. Focused stretch: Check in time. Practice breathing routine.**
- 2. Focused catch: Play catch instead of just getting loose.**
- 3. Have a plan for: BP, bullpens, defense, etc.**
- 4. Work on your pre-pitch routine.**
- 5. Practice dealing with adversity.**
- 6. Visualize situations, hitting spots, different types of pitches.**
- 7. Practice regrouping.**
- 8. Run bases with focus and respect you use in a game.**

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE VISUALIZATION:

- 1. Work in as many senses as you can.**
- 2. Make your images as vivid and as clear as you can.**
- 3. Use internal imagery.**
- 4. See yourself doing things well.**

5. **See yourself successfully overcoming errors, bad calls, etc.**

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE SELF-TALK:

1. **Keep your self-talk as positive as possible.**
2. **Keep your self-talk task relevant.**
3. **Make sure the last thought in your head before each pitch is positive and directs your focus to the task at hand.**

IMAGERY IDEAS:

1. **PITCHING:**

- a). Recall a time when you were pitching well. Mentally relive the thoughts, feelings, and results you had during that outing.
- b). See yourself pitching well against the team you are about to face. See yourself successfully going through your pitching routine, retiring batter after batter.
- c). See yourself responding well to adversity. Visualize one of your fielders making an error, the umpire calling a strike a ball, or a batter hitting the ball off the wall. See yourself keeping your composure, going through your strategy for releasing frustration, anger, or anxiety, and coming back to make good pitches to the next batter.

2. **HITTING:**

- a). 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 off the bat. Feel the confidence you had during those times.
- b). See yourself having great at-bats against your upcoming opponent. Image hitting against right and left handed pitchers. Remind yourself of what your plan is and see yourself executing it perfectly.
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- c). Image yourself going through batting practice. Feel yourself being in a good mood, having fun, and getting your work done. See yourself stepping into the cage with a clear purpose in mind and experience yourself hitting line drives to all parts of the field.

3. **FIELDING:**

- a). Recall defensive plays that you have made in the past. Think of the best three plays you've ever made. Relive them in as much detail as you can.

b). See yourself cleanly making plays against your next opponent. Feel yourself go through your pre-pitch movement and field ball with excellent mechanics.

c). See yourself reacting positively after just making an error. Go through your strategy to release that error and get ready for next pitch. Hear yourself say, "Hit it to me." Finally, image yourself Successfully make the next play.