



25 Lessons to Develop Successful Baseball Players (and Make it to the Major Leagues?)

AT BAT

with Jack Perconte

Thinking way back on some of the things I did that helped me make it to the major leagues, along with pondering many of the teaching methods I now employ to help baseball players improve, I have come up with 25 tips that may make the difference in a young player's career. Many of them will seem obvious, where others may open your eyes to something new.

First though, I want to mention two lessons that were in the news recently during the major league baseball season. I hope youth coaches and sports parents pointed these memorable stories out to their teams and kids.

There is no better lesson for young ballplayers to learn than the ability to handle adversity. Baseball, like all sports, involves much failure and learning to handle it will make all the difference in players being able to progress up the baseball ladder. Handling adversity with class is exactly what Detroit Tiger pitcher Armando Galarraga did when it was determined that he would not have his deserved, perfect game. Most players would not have handled such adversity with "a smile," after all, immortality was waiting. It was not meant to be but Armando will be remembered a long time for his display of sportsmanship, humanity and handling adversity.

A less reported story, that many sports fans may have missed, speaks volumes about Dustin Pedroia, the great Boston Red Sox second baseman. The day after he was placed on the disabled list with a broken foot, Dustin was taking ground balls on his knees for practice. The day after! And he is an All Star. There is just no substitute for hard work and love of the game that Pedroia displayed.

I can't think of two more important characteristics to develop ballplayers and have a shot at the major leagues than love of the game and handling adversity. I can think of numerous examples in my life of players with abundant talent, who quit playing baseball because they lacked the traits that these two players showed. Stories like those make me proud to have been a major league player, especially when negative stories about ball players have permeated the game for some time. In reality, positive stories like the above could be written about most major league players because they would not be where they are (major leagues) without the class and commitment that Armando and Dustin have. Unfortunately, most of those positive stories go unreported.

Following are 25 Lessons to develop successful ball players – some address players' physical game and others the mental.

1. Attend professional baseball games with young players when affordable for the fun and electric atmosphere that accompanies these games. The love often begins there.
2. Attend local college and high school games and bring a bat and ball along to play on the side when youngsters get antsy. Seeing skills and the game performed well will put correct images in players' minds.
3. Play ball with young ball players whenever they want and for as long as they want. Adults should try not to be the one to end the practice (play) session and adults should try to perform baseball actions (throwing, catching, fielding, etc...) as fundamentally correct as possible.
4. Use safety balls with tentative or fearful players so the risk of painful injury from the ball when batting or fielding is reduced. The confidence gained is worth using non-game balls.
5. Learn how to use a baseball-batting tee correctly and use it like a golfer uses the driving range – before games to warm up and perform drills, and after games to correct fundamentals and make adjustments.
6. Learn as many baseball drills as possible to avoid boredom from setting in when practicing.
7. Make sure throwing mechanics are sound and throw, throw and throw – staying mindful of rest days and tired arms, of course. Having a professional instructor evaluate a player's throwing, fielding and hitting skills can be well worth it.
8. Young ballplayers should practice fielding as much as hitting and learn to play as many positions as possible.
9. Advanced players should use wood bats with hard balls for better feedback when taking batting practice.
10. Having a safe wall to throw off for throwing and fielding practice can increase the rate of repetition and give kids a practice field of their own.
11. Using a small glove at a young age will help players develop the hand/eye coordination necessary to catch the ball correctly and consistently.
12. Teach players when to use two hands to catch a ball and when to use just the glove to catch other balls.
13. Use dropped-ball hitting drill as opposed to the often-used side-flip hitting drill. Dropped-ball drill is more challenging and promotes a more compact swing.
14. Mix in rag, whiffle and regular baseballs in batting

practice to automatically create different speeds and movements on pitched balls. Additionally, it is easier to throw curve balls with rag balls.

15. Allow players to make their own decisions in games and teach after the fact, not while the action is occurring.

16. Remember, it is easier to create new habits than break old ones; so learning the correct fundamentals at a young age can be crucial.

17. Along the same lines, it is better to perform a skill correctly 10 times than to practice something 100 times, but incorrectly.

18. Age appropriate strength training is recommended. Many potential star players drop off before reaching their growth or strength spurt.

19. Learn ways of making practice fun and engaging. Talking to experienced coaches for new ideas can be beneficial.

20. Teach kids the importance of being coachable – everything a coach teaches is worth a try – use the things that work and discard those that don't with the understanding that results take time and that change will always feel uncomfortable at first.

21. Nothing can be more important than finding a knowledgeable, caring and patient coach for a determined ball player.

22. Parents and coaches should remember that negativity rarely, if ever, inspires; but truthful talk, not

false praise, is always necessary.

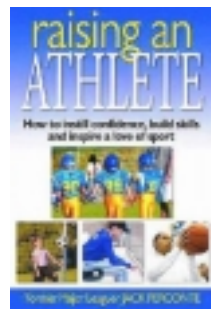
23. Players who have short-term memory loss are usually the most successful in the long run. Being able to put the last at-bat, pitch and game behind is necessary to stay focused on what a player can control - the present.

24. Having self-confidence is important but it can come and go. An optimistic life attitude can be taught with positive coaching techniques and can last forever.

25. Players should play as long as one still enjoys playing and should not let others tell them it is time to quit playing, (look up Jamie Moyer story for example.)

Finally, God-given athletic talent always helps to attain success but it is not the most important factor. If talent alone was responsible for reaching potential, there would be a whole different set of major league players.

Jack is the author of "The Making of a Hitter" A Proven and Practical Step-by-Step Baseball Guide. To read more about it visit www.themakingofahitter.com or www.baseballhittinglessons.com. His latest book, Raising an Athlete: How to Instill Confidence, Build Skills and Inspire a Love of Sport is now available. Read more about it at his blog – positiveparentinginsports.com and also be sure to check out www.baseballhittinglessons.com/baseball.



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