



LJYB Player Development
Mental Game
“Baseball Intelligence”

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Key Points

- 1) Nearly all of a coach's effort is spent on developing the physical skills of a baseball player, while very little time is spent on coaching the mental attitude of a player.
- 2) This is particularly surprising given that few kids actually use the physical skills past the age of 12, while the mental attitude is something that can be applied for the rest of their life in a variety of situations.
- 3) Mental attitude is not dependent on skill-level. As such, it can be applied universally across a team even with a wide disparity of talent.
- 4) Like physical skills, mental attitude is something that needs to be learned through practice – i.e. coaching and repetition.
- 5) There are 4 key components to the mental game or “Baseball Intelligence”:
 - a. Understanding the difference between mental and physical errors.
 - b. Developing a deeper understanding of the parameters of practice.
 - c. The importance of “Max Effort” in baseball.
 - d. The important difference between winning and doing your best to win.

Baseball Intelligence #1:

Difference Between Mental and Physical Errors

- 1) While physical errors are part of the game even at the professional level, every player should strive to minimize mental errors at all levels.
- 2) The two biggest mental errors are:
 - a. Not being mentally ready to hit, run, or field (which includes knowing what to do in various situations).
 - b. Letting a previous error, bad call, fans, other team, strikeout etc. affect how you play going forward. (You would be surprised how well kids understand this once you explain it to them.)
- 3) Like any other skill-set, minimizing mental errors needs to be practiced through coaching and repetition.

Baseball Intelligence #2:

Understand the Parameters of Practice

1) Behind every kid that is a “natural” are hundreds of hours of practice. This goes well beyond baseball and a crucial life lesson – you want to be good at something, you have to practice. Research has also shown that the human body may need 1,000 repetitions just to develop muscle memory. It’s a marathon, not a sprint.

2) Research has shown that efficient and productive practice goes well beyond hours alone. Practice also entails effort/intensity, as well as intelligence – i.e. practicing with purpose – with specific and achievable goals in mind every repetition. Feedback, from a coach, parent or other player is also crucial in the process of developing expertise.

3) Each kid needs to understand these parameters of practice and the effort it takes to have traditional success. This is communicated directly and indirectly. As an example, rather than referring to a kid as a “great hitter,” the message is better sent as “he/she has worked very hard at developing a great swing,” which implies that if you work hard, you can have a great swing, too.

Baseball Intelligence #3:

The Importance of “Max Effort” in Baseball

- 1) Baseball is a unique sport given its infrequent, but explosive, repetitions.
- 2) It is important to develop an aggressive frame of mind that emphasizes max effort of each repetition.
- 4) Fewer repetitions at maximum effort are better than a lot of repetitions at half-effort.
- 4) If you practice with “max effort,” that is how you will play.
- 5) This ties in directly to both mental preparation and goal-oriented practice.

Baseball Intelligence #4:

The Important Difference of Winning and Doing Your Best to Win

- 1) Kids at the youth level “consistently” get an inconsistent message regarding the score and winning and whether it matters.
- 2) It is important to establish that each kid should internalize “winning” as whether they did their best. Building on this, a successful game should not be defined whether your team wins or loses, but whether collectively as a team you did your best.
- 3) Whether your team wins or loses the game is largely out of the hands of what each individual kid can control. But, what each kid can control is the effort they give each game.