

# THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

THE COACHES' SOURCE FOR AMATEUR BASEBALL

www.baseballcollegian.com

Issue 8 - February 1, 2026



## 2026 ABCA Best in Show Products

*The Baseball Collegian* visited every booth at the 2026 ABCA convention, and saw over one thousand products that are part of making the game of baseball great. From bats to screens to uniforms to technological advances, there were opportunities for everyone to maximize their baseball program.

Many items stood out for their creativity and impact on the game. This issue celebrates a select few who stood out with our annual BEST IN SHOW product winners.

**WINNERS ON PAGE 8**



## The Bunting Problem

BY MARK WOODWORTH  
EDITOR/THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

Can we maybe look at bunting a little differently?

Is standard bunting technique really as successful as it should be?

Is standard bunting technique safe for our players?

Something is going on here. Even bad hitters with no power don't want to bunt for hits. When they do, they are often popped up, fouled off, or go to the pitcher.

Too often, bunting is thought of as a referendum on being a team player. It's seen as easy – "Just get it down!" It's seen as an act of will and desire.

No – this is about technique and safety.

We all know about the demise of the bunt. Maybe it's better that there are less bunts today, because players don't even realize until it's too late that their technique is putting them in extreme harm's way. This exposure might be an even more important reason to look at bunting differently.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 18**

### More Inside!

NCAA Rules Meeting  
Book Excerpt-Baseball as a Road to God  
ABCA & Mohegan Sun Conventions  
ABCA Best in Show  
The Training Trend – Pre-season Tips  
Baseball IQ Quiz  
Pre-Season Coaches Checklist  
The Bunting Problem  
Does Bunting Still Matter?  
Jeff Smith-The Tools of a Catcher  
The Baseball Collegian Pitching Project  
Book Excerpt-Lessons from Little League  
Beyond the Field-A Video Journey  
Win Your Day!

# The Latest 2026 NCAA Rules Meeting

By **MARK WOODWORTH**  
EDITOR/THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

The packed room at the NCAA Rules Meeting at the 2026 ABCA Convention in Columbus, Ohio held some fascinating insights into the vision of college baseball ahead. Here are the highlights:

## National Coordinator of Umpires - Jeff Gosney - (new in 2026)

### Tech in Dugout

Experimental rule: DI-only.

Must be approved by conferences.

Allowed apps in dugout:

Trackman - modified dashboard and no strike zone

Note-taking apps

Pre-loaded or recorded video

### Foreign Substances

There was only 1 foreign substance violation in NCAA in 2025.

### Double First Base

League that experimented with the double first base had mixed reviews. Reduced congestions, but confusion about returning to base and appeals.

Review system for postseason umpire assignments.

## NCAA Baseball Secretary and Rules Editor - Randy Brunns

### New interpretations

Physically assisting a runner

Pitching set vs. windup distinctions

### Action Clock Adjustments

20-second clock starts after dead ball when pitcher is in:

Possession of ball

On **or near** the dirt circle

Everyone is in the right place on the field

## Playing Rules Committee Chair - Jordan Bischel (Cincinnati Head Coach)

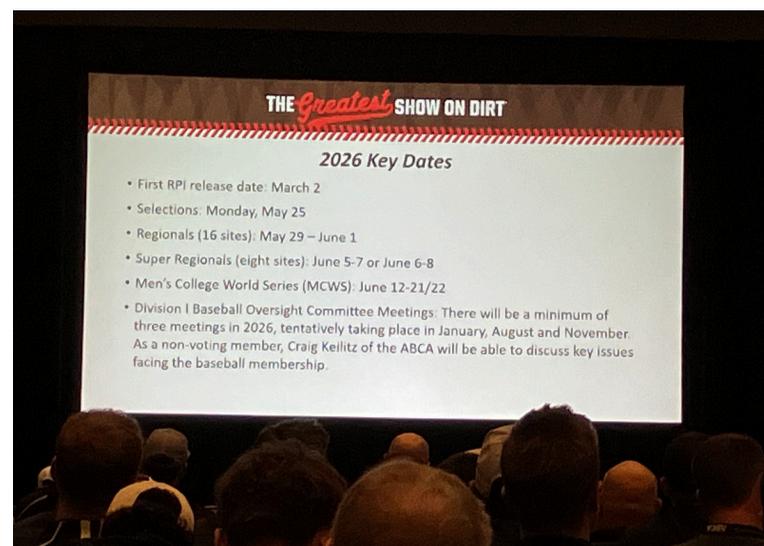
Future possible rule concepts being discussed:

Automatic 12-run rule

Starting runner on 2B in extra innings - 10th inning? 12 inning?

Runs & Home Runs per game:

“We need to start talking about where we’re heading with this.”



## Division I Rules Meeting Notes

### Division I Chair Chris Pollard (Virginia Head coach)

Big wins this year:

34 players on postseason roster

Practice start date of Jan. 11

More fall competitions

Operations staff - more on field and recruiting opportunities

### NCAA Committee Chair - Michael Alford (Florida State AD)

New in 2026: Seeding 50% of the championship bracket (1-32)

New additions to rankings this year

Com, ittee is really encouraged to watch games

### Craig Keilitz (ABCA Executive Director)

“Changes are happening because we earned it.”

### Kyle Peterson (ESPN broadcaster)

New ranking system called DSR to complement RPI and KPI will be added in 2026. A partnership between Diamond Sports Rankings & 6-4-3 charts.

# THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

THE COACHES' SOURCE FOR AMATEUR BASEBALL

[www.baseballcollegian.com](http://www.baseballcollegian.com)

Issue 8  
February 1, 2026

Publisher/Editor **Mark Woodworth**  
413-531-9289  
mark@baseballcollegian.com

Asst. Editor/Website **Loren Foxx**  
loren@tcbagency.com  
tcbagency.com

Advertising **John Keefe**  
jhkeefe44@gmail.com  
508-942-3272

## From the Publisher

The 2026 Season is upon us! College Baseball is in full swing with practices before games start in mid-February. Things will most certainly happen: lots and lots of games, walk-offs, thrilling wins, agonizing losses, record-breaking performances, poor seasons, injuries, champions, draftees, disappointments and successes.

Here's what this long-time college coach wishes for the season ahead for baseball coaches:

- **Remembering** the reason they got into coaching in the first place
- **Joy** in the daily act of being on the field every day
- **Peace** of mind in handling all the off-field stuff
- **Sleep**
- **Excitement** each day to see the impact they are making on so many people.

Best of luck to everyone this season!

*Mark A. Woodworth*

## Online

[www.baseballcollegian.com](http://www.baseballcollegian.com)

## Publication

Online/Emailed monthly/Printed Quarterly

## Social Media

Twitter/Instagram

## Keep Receiving The Baseball Collegian!

Go to: [www.baseballcollegian.com](http://www.baseballcollegian.com)

### E-Newspaper

Free in your inbox every month!

#### THE BEST OF THE COLLEGIAN

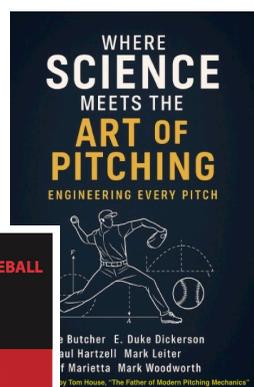
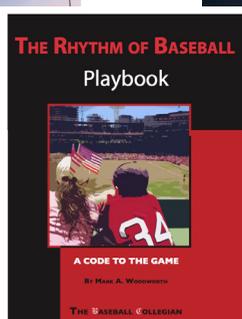
The Coaches' Source for Amateur Baseball 2025 Special Issue

From the Pages of

The Baseball Collegian

Top Baseball Instructional Articles of 2025

Article	Page
Is the Batting Tee Dead?	2
13 Reasons to Take the 1st Pitch of the First At-Bat	4
A Coach's Perspective on the Importance of the First Pitch	6
A Coach's Perspective on the Importance of the First Pitch	8
The Myth of Batting Average by Count	10
Coaching Technique in Practice	12
The Making of a Complete Pitcher	14
Challenging Instructional Article	16
Positioning the Team Way	20
Harvest: A Historical Perspective on Approach	22
The Baseball Hall of Fame	24
Confidence: A Coach's Perspective	26



### Print Subscription

Receive The Baseball Collegian in print quarterly (January/April/July/October).  
Choose your contribution covers printing and mailing costs.

#### Rookie of the Year Subscription Level

\$24 1 Year Quarterly Print Subscription (Quarterly print issues in the mail).

#### Cy Young Subscription Level

\$28 1 Year Quarterly Print Subscription  
+ "Best of Collegian" (2025 Top instruction articles e-newsletter).

#### MVP Subscription Level

\$35 1 Year Quarterly Print Subscription  
+ "Best of Collegian" e-newsletter  
+ Rhythm of Baseball ebook (75 page coaching playbook).

#### Subscription Level to be Named Later

Want to support at a different level? Suggested cost covers:

1 Year Quarterly Print Subscription  
+ "Best of Collegian" + Rhythm of Baseball ebook  
+ "Where Science Meets the Art of Pitching" - ebook

# Baseball as a Road to God

## Seeing Beyond the Game

By JOHN SEXTON

WITH THOMAS OLIPHANT AND PETER J. SCHWARTZ  
AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK, *BASEBALL AS A ROAD TO GOD*

---

### Sacred Space and Time

Some sacred moments occur when “time is out” and the game is halted. So it was on September 6, 1995, when the crowd inside Baltimore’s Oriole Park at Camden Yards erupted into a twenty-two minute ovation in honor of Cal Ripken Jr. after the fifth inning in a game against the California Angels.

The game had just then become “official,” and it therefore was official that Ripken had played in his 2,131st consecutive game, breaking what was once thought to be baseball’s most unassailable record. As the cheering crowd rose in awe, Ripken circled not the bases, but the entire ballpark, stopping frequently to shake hands with fans along the rails. The effect was as magical as it was celebratory. In their book *All Things Shining*, philosophers Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly describe how, in such moments, “something overwhelming occurs.” As they put it, the cheering crowd “wells up and carries you along as on a powerful wave. The wave metaphor is crucial here. Where a wave is at its most powerful, it is a solid foundation that can support as many riders as will fit upon it. It can even sweep up more as it runs along. But when the wave passes, nothing but its memory survives. Try to stand upon the still water and you’ll find that the supporting foundation is gone. Those moments of sport are like that. When you are in the midst of them, riding the wave, they carry you along and give meaning to life.”

The outpouring of emotion for Ripken was simultaneously a nod to the quiet dignity of Lou Gehrig, the previous record holder – an example of baseball’s intertwining of past and present. The sanctity of Gehrig and his record formed a halo upon Ripken as he broke it, the two were united as one.

John Sexton served as the President of New York University from 2002 to 2015. He still teaches the class he created, *Baseball as a Road to God*, culminating in the *NY Times* best-selling book of the same name.

A new movie based on his book and his lectures, titled *Baseball: Beyond Belief*, is about how baseball, community and religion intersect in our lives. It will be released in the spring of 2026.

It had been almost six decades since Gehrig uttered legendary words in his farewell address at Yankee Stadium, a farewell forced by the terminal illness that eventually bore his name: “Today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth... I might have been given a bad break, but I’ve got an awful lot to live for.” To this day, Gehrig is celebrated on the anniversary of the speech – the Fourth of July – by the Yankees each year they are home (making an already sacred time that much more meaningful), and on one occasion (2009, the seventieth anniversary) by all of baseball, as the speech was recited, word for word, by representatives of every home team in the major leagues. In this and many other ways, baseball creates and lives the cyclical, repetitive liturgy and sacramental time of religion.

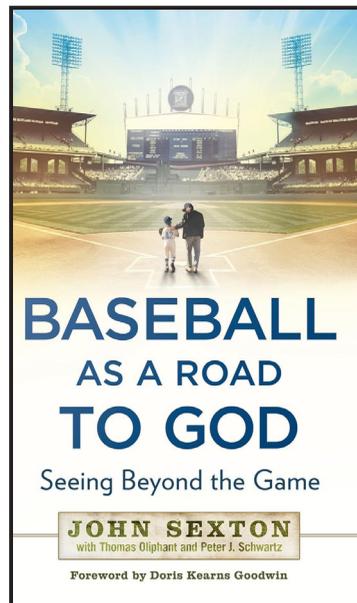
Inti Raymi, the Incan Festival of the Sun, celebrates the winter solstice by honoring the god Inti, with hopes of a good harvest in the coming year. In recent years, the ceremony (their Opening Day) has gained a measure of renown through a historical reconstruction, held in Cusco, Peru, as a weeklong ode to its heritage. But before it was suppressed by the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century, the Inti Raymi was a deeply pious affair and is said to have been marked by precise execution of rituals (some gruesome) in the same manner and location each year. Thousands of Inca convened,

often after journeying hundreds of miles, usually on foot, in the hope of touching a higher spiritual plane while reliving their mythical story of origin, together. And over millennia, such sacramental moments have been part of humankind's effort to touch the deepest plane of existence. This is the power of myth.

Today, especially in the West, that word, *myth*, too often is used as a synonym for falsehood. The Greek word *mythos* originally meant a truth that is experienced, an awareness that lies beyond words. As theologian Karen Armstrong wrote, "A myth was never intended as an accurate account of a historical event, it was something that had in some sense happened once but that also happens all the time."

Mythos takes us to sacred places and sacred times – spaces and times beyond. To places revered for their mystical power, evoking an ineffable feeling of connection to something great like Newgrange, Stonehenge, Uluru, and Easter Island. And to sacred times like Easter, Yom Kippur, Ramadan, and the Inti Raymi festival, or to a ball field on Opening Day.

In the decades since C. P. Snow decried the split between science and religion in his seminal lecture, *The Two Cultures*, the chasm between the two has widened. Today, skeptics often use science to mock religion, typically by dismissing the anthropomorphic God of the simplest forms of theism. And



sometimes they dismiss the religious dimension altogether. This is a mistake. In fact, we humans can go beyond science even as we embrace it and its wonderful gifts.

Albert Einstein once said: "As the circle of light increases, so does the circumference of darkness around it." Sometimes that darkness awaits additional light, light that will transform the unknown into the known. But sometimes, as Einstein himself attested, the darkness represents the unknowable, the ineffable. Thus, the transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau wrote in his journal on Christmas Day, 1851:

I, standing twenty miles off, see a crimson cloud in the horizon. You tell me it is a mass of vapor which absorbs all other rays and reflects the red, but that is nothing to the purpose, for this red vision excites me, stirs my blood, makes my thoughts flow, and I have new and indescribable fancies, and you have not touched the secret of that influence. If there is not something mystical in your explanation, something unexplainable to the understanding, some elements of mystery, it is quite insufficient. If there is nothing in it which speaks to my imagination, what boots it? What sort of science is that which enriches the understanding, but robs the imagination?

Thoreau was pointing to Rudolf Otto's *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Meaning can be found beyond what we can capture rationally (including what we capture in the dogmatic trappings of religion), whether it is evoked by music, art, or nature.

Or baseball.

**John Sexton** is the President Emeritus of New York University, after previously serving as the Dean of the NYU Law School. He received a PhD in History of American Religion from Fordham, a JD from Harvard, and has received 24 honorary degrees.

**Thomas Oliphant** was a columnist for *The Boston Globe* for 40 years, and has been a part of the Baseball as a Road to God seminar for years.

**Peter J. Schwartz** is a sports attorney at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher and Flom and formerly was a reporter for *Forbes*. He was the first student ever enrolled in the Baseball as a Road to God seminar.

By **MARK WOODWORTH**  
 EDITOR/THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

The ABCA convention landed in Columbus, Ohio in 2026 and the setting and layout was outstanding. The adjacent hotels, easy access to the trade show and lecture hall, and smaller clinics and meeting rooms all in one place made it easy to experience everything. A unique feature was actually seeing daylight! The row of restaurants right outside the door made it easy to get food and have a break before diving back in.

The opening of the convention with 8,000 coaches continues to be an inspiring moment. ABCA President Bob Whalen, who just retired after a long and distinguished career at Dartmouth, welcomed everyone before honoring on stage the national coaches of the year (national champions in their respective divisions), and assistant coaches of the year. Larry Redwine from the Continental Amateur Baseball Association and Jerry Ford from Perfect Game and the Rise 2 Greatness Foundation were honored with the Travel Service Award. Tom O’Connell introduced the Dave Keilitz Ethics in Coaching Awards to Tom Griffin from Carson-Newman University and Kermit Smith from Appalachian State University who made strong speeches.

The tradition of the coach of the past year’s NCAA Division I Championship team speaking first is always a highlight. Jay Johnson from LSU kicked off the coaches clinics (for the second time in the past three years) talking about qualities of elite coaches. He led with discussing the impact of his assistant coaches and staff members on LSU’s success, before giving advice and examples for coaches who want to move up: “The most important thing you can do is do a great job where you’re at.”

He then moved to coaching advice to best help players: “You can’t overwhelm the player with information. The longer I do this, the more I believe simplicity is really sophisticated. If I am too complex, I am completely destroying the execution that I’m looking for. The best development systems are simple, they’re logical in how they progress, and they are inspiring. If we do this, then we have a great chance of this working out the way that we want to.”



LSU National Championship Coach Jay Johnson



The 2025 ABCA/ATEC National Coaches of the Year

One of the great innovations over the years has been the expansion of the Hot Stove Panels. Not just five years ago, there was one hitting and one pitching Hot Stove. This year, there were 11 panels and 58 speakers covering everything from hitting to leadership to baserunning and strength and conditioning. The casual Q&A interplay in a smaller-group setting has turned into one of the best learning opportunities at the convention.

### ABCA Future Dates and Locations

<b>2027</b> – Jan. 7-10	Chicago, Illinois
<b>2028</b> – Jan. 6-9	Nashville, Tenn
<b>2029</b> - Jan. 4-7	National Harbor, Md.
<b>2030</b> - Jan. 3-6	Austin, Texas

# 2026 Mohegan Sun Baseball Convention

The Mohegan Sun World Baseball Coaches Convention is really a profound lab for learning baseball and should not be missed by anyone who coaches the sport. Certainly a highlight is the regional nature of seeing friends in New England from the baseball world from a smaller northeast radius than the ABCA convention, while the focus on elite coaches giving multiple presentations on very detailed aspects of the game is profound.

With 2-4 panels happening at all times, there is always something for everyone's interest every year. The two speaker halls are perfect for ideas and visuals, while a batting cage and actual field offer real demonstrations with actual players.



**Infielding clinic on the diamond run by Steve Trimper (Stetson) and Brandon Brewer (Miami)**

The adjacent trade show is also a great opportunity for coaches and vendors to connect. The more than 60 booths are essential stops to learn about the latest in everything from uniforms, baseball training tools, gloves, bats, field equipment, motivational tools and baseball technology.



**Recruiting panel moderated by Wayne Mazzoni (College Sports Advisors): L-R: Jim Martin (Stony Brook), Rob Valli (Rowan-Gloucester), and JP Pyne (Amherst)**

The first-class slate of coaches from around the country gave incredible coaching insight to the attendees. Everything you can imagine was covered, from Tracy Smith (Michigan) speaking about social media strategies, Dan Skirka (Murray State) talking about culture building, Brandon Brewer (Miami) on elite defensive training techniques, J.P. Pyne (Amherst) on recruiting and developing assistant coaches, Steve Trimper (Stetson) on base-running, and scores of other pro and college coaches on ideas on being a great coach.



# Best in Show!

## ABCA 2026

*The Baseball Collegian* continues the tradition of celebrating outstanding and valuable products at the ABCA convention. While technology has certainly become a big part of the baseball products industry, innovation has also occurred in all kinds of player and coach and program needs.

Here is our celebration of a select few who stood out to be honored as a 2026 ABCA BEST IN SHOW winner.



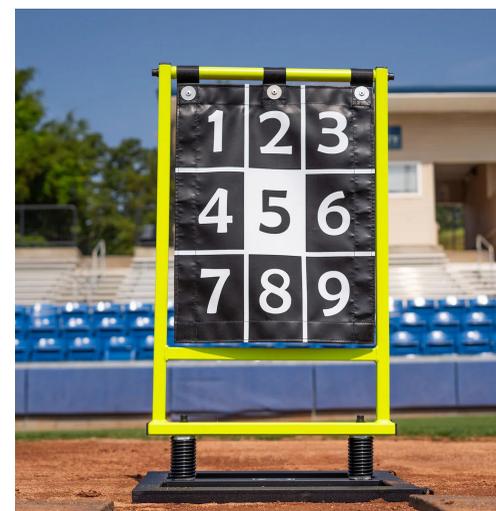
### **TAG Sports** Innovative Radar Gun [tagsports.ai](http://tagsports.ai)



Metrics have become such a big aspect of the game, and TAG sports has innovated a completely new and exciting concept in radar guns. With just a small and simple attachment to the back of your phone, Tag uses an app to display key elements of the game: Pitch speeds, exit velocity, and video clips. Additionally, TAG boasts a 6+ hour rechargeable battery and no subscriptions for data or videos.

### **BP Zones™** Portable Strike Zone [bpzones.com](http://bpzones.com)

You never have enough bullpen catchers, and with all the pitches that are needed to be thrown, a portable strike zone target is essential. BP Zones is an innovator with its Sure Strike product that is “Designed to provide an accurate and consistent strike zone for your practices.” It features a strong metal frame, springs to sway when hit by pitches, and its tight, concise pitching zones.



# Best in Show ABCA 2026

## Camel City Posters

Field Signage  
camelcityposters.com



Field logos are becoming more and more essential, both in making fields unique, as well as for advertising opportunities. Camel City Posters uses its vast experience in graphic design to make sports venues stand out. Featuring customizable products for outfield walls, scoreboards, dugouts and even foul poles and tarps.

## Levinson Athletics

Pitching Machine repair  
levinsonathletics.com



A provider of field supplies and facility outfitting, Levinson Athletics also provides the impactful unique service of pitching machine repair. Specializing in Hack Attack and ATEC baseball machines, their diagnostic and repair services use high-quality replacement parts and even emergency service repair.

## WinWon Technologies

AI Recruiting Platform  
www.winwontech.com/ai-powered-recruiting



Coaches value as much as information as possible in recruiting, and the internet is certainly a source. WinWon has innovated an AI search called WinWon Recruiting Copilot that with the simple typing of a name, scours the internet for an incredible amount of data on players in seconds. This feature is a powerful complement to the broad-based solutions WinWon offers in their platform that connects schedules, compliance, recruiting, emails, texting and profiles all in one place.

## No Errors Sports

Glove Shaper  
no-errors.com



Among many fantastic baseball products, including their sequence training bats, training gloves, and catchers bags with sturdy wheels, No Errors also offers an innovative glove-shaper. Their Web Gem Glove Form keeps gloves shaped and ready at all times. Offering protection so gloves don't pancake, the Glove Form speeds up glove break-in times, and helps keep gloves game-ready.

# Best in Show ABCA 2026

## Raised Decals

3D Decals & Bag Tags  
raiseddecals.com



Helmet decals are a must-have item for teams, and 3D Decals & Bag Tags takes it to the next level. Their raised 3D decals in all colors and designs are not only durable, but offer exceptional branding for teams. 3D Decals & Bag Tags are the largest producer of custom 3D helmet decals in baseball and softball.

## ThrowMo

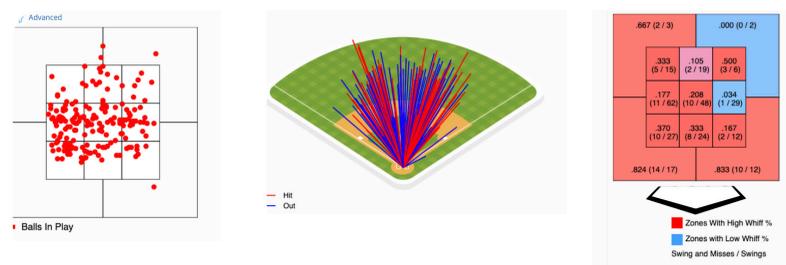
Turf Mound Trainer  
throwmotrainer.com



Stride Direction for hitters and pitchers is a very important technique checkpoint. The ThrowMo trainer is a simple teaching tool to help players feel their stride direction and make adjustments easily without having to look down. The slight elevation allows for players to safely be off-line without impacting their balance.

## Hitting Approach

Game Analytics app  
hittingapproach.com



You can make a case that the game is won or lost in the strike zone, and Hitting Approach is a simple and easy way to help players with this part of the game. Their pitch-tracking app allows teams to easily chart pitch location data. Charting games pitch-by-pitch on your phone results in meaningful data for players, including contact, whiff and take percentages, spray charts, hard-hit balls, and pitchers strike percentages by pitch type.

## Japanese Baseball Gear

Javelin Training Aid  
japanesebaseballgear.com



LA Dodgers pitcher and 2025 World Series MVP Yoshi Yamamoto is becoming well-known for his dynamic strength program, focusing on balance and athleticism instead of weights. One tool he uses is the Flecha Javelin from Japanese Baseball Gear – a mini-javelin created to train throwing with the entire body to emphasis explosive ground-up throwing.

# Best in Show ABCA 2026

**Collectible Canvas**  
Unique Team Awards  
[collectiblecanvas.com](http://collectiblecanvas.com)



Senior Day festivities are becoming more and more an essential part of a coach's job, and the right award for players is increasingly important. Collectible Canvas offers memorable team awards at a great price point to best celebrate players. Featured among their gifts for players, seniors and coaches are their unique Home Plate Canvas awards that can be customized with photos and logos.

**Stalker Sport**  
Spin Rate Radar Gun  
[stalkersport.com](http://stalkersport.com)



Spin Rate has become a valued metric, but until now, has not been available in a radar gun. Stalker Sports has been a longtime leader in radar guns, and now their Pro3s radar gun is the only one on the market that measures spin rate. It also can track exit velocity, in addition to the traditional pitch velocity.

**GrandStand Buckets**  
Innovative Ball Bucket  
[grandstandbuckets.com](http://grandstandbuckets.com)

Grandstand ball buckets are a needed innovation for coaches. A seemingly normal ball bucket transforms simply into two buckets, with one that nests on top so no need to bend during batting practice. Additionally, their Auto-Rise™ system lifts the bottom of the bucket, so you are always taking balls from the top of the bucket. Also available with team logos!



**V-Flex**  
Screens for Visual Focus  
[vflexsports.com](http://vflexsports.com)

Pitch selection choice for hitters, and pitch location command for pitchers, are at the heart of achieving success in baseball. V-Flex screens are ahead of their time using visual focal points to train the brain for hitters to recognize and react to strikes. For pitchers, C-Flex screens help to use these visual focal points to better identify and target the strike zone.



# The Training Trend A New 33% Model

By MARK WOODWORTH  
EDITOR/THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

## The trend is training.

Players are attacking their games with out-of-season training like never before. Strength training, speed training, mobility training; Hitting and pitching and fielding techniques and drills; Arm care, pitch tracking data, hit tracking data. Indoor facilities.

All of these things have been exciting and inspiring for players. They have helped players evolve their games and make improvements that are measurable.

There's another trend though.

That is, the trend of *training* for baseball becoming more important than *playing* baseball.

In the last 15 years of college coaching, I noticed a major trend in player self-evaluations. When asked what they needed to do to improve their game, the majority of answers focused mostly on lifting and fixing their technique. These players believed over and over that those two fixes would transform them into becoming the player they wanted to be.

Yet, lifting and technique did not solely lift them to the holy land. These same players had all kinds of gaps in their games – speed, quickness, agility, hitting plans, pitching plans, baserunning techniques, sleep, diet, game focus, practice focus, resiliency skills, baseball IQ.

Yet, the trend in training is making players think that all they have to do to play well is simply lift and hit and throw hard.

It makes sense. It's relatively easy to lift and hit and throw off a mound and throw weighted balls in a net. It's easy to get the satisfaction of working hard by going to the weight room and going to the batting cage or the baseball training center. It's accessible. It's social. It's what everyone is doing. It gives players pride in working on their games.



But here's what is hard to do out-of-season: Speed and agility drills; athletic training drills; endless ground balls; hitting breaking pitches and other timings; improving baserunning and fielding jumps; pickoffs, PFP's; and pitch-by-pitch focus.

There are never one or two things that make you a great baseball player. Everything works and everything doesn't work. It's a combination of everything.



Yet, the issues in the trends of training need to be addressed. Part of the problem is the Covid shutdown: As one coach put it, “Training was the only thing players knew and could do.” That legacy is embedded in players. However, it seems imperative the things coaches talk about (and lament) – fielding, baserunning, IQ and feel for the game, battling, perseverance – be worked on in their training.

Thus, here’s a concept to training that will better prepare players for actually playing baseball, not just training for baseball.

### **The 33% Model**

Here’s a case that time spent on training for baseball in the off-season should be:

- 33% strength training,
- 33% speed, agility and athleticism
- 33% technique, practice reps, focus and IQ training

Mostly (definitely in cold-weather areas), off-season training is 50% lifting and 50% hitting/bullpens. But by resetting the ratio, it can encompass the skills needed to be ready for the season.

### **33% Strength Training**

Lifting weights, getting stronger and arm care are certainly important parts of the game. The math matters: Mass times velocity equals force. However, this needs to be offset by the needs of the game that incorporate...

### **33% Speed, Agility and Athleticism**

Strength can definitely help with speed and quickness and athleticism. However, we traditionally define a great athlete as someone who is fast and strong, but that definition is proven to be only partially correct over and over (see Gretzky, Maddux). A better definition of a great athlete is someone who can perform the unpredictable movement patterns of the game; Has a sense of the body in space (proprioception), can make quick starts and stops; can dive and get up, has great hand-eye coordination, makes quick decisions, handles pressure.

These things need to be trained. Yes, sprints, ladder drills and jumps are great. But even those are limiting because they don’t include proprioception, hand-eye, decisions, unpredictability. In addition to those trainings, how about basketball, football pass routes, soccer, squash/tennis/racquetball, and jumping rope? When performed with intensity, these definitely train speed, agility and that mythic athleticism.

### **33% Technique, practice reps, focus and IQ training**

This is what people think of the most for off-season training. Training spaces have popped up everywhere. Hitting reps are usually able to be achieved, but it demands focus on different timings (pitching machines fail at this). Also much needed: Pitch shape reps, or learning a new pitch; Watching game film (should not be just for football players); Creating a plan for what you’re going to do when things don’t go well (example, Ken Ravizza’s green-yellow-red lights); Thrown balls off a wall; Brian Cain’s Success Checklist; Standing in and tracking pitches.

In fact, this is not far from Cal Ripken’s off-season daily routine: Lift, play basketball, and 100 ground balls off a wall. It cannot be a coincidence that he was able to play both at a high level, and literally every day.

This 33% model might seem self-evident, but the trend speaks otherwise. It requires encouragement from coaches and strength coaches and training center directors. It requires a new culture. It’s not old-school or new school, but more like the next adaptation of training to be a great baseball player.

# Baseball Pre-Season Practice Systems Checklist

Team systems to cover before the season begins (Boxes note amount of practice sessions needed)

## Bunts

Man on 1B	
Straight	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Man on 1B & 2B	
Straight	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
SS Break to 2B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Wheel	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

## Comebackers

0 men on	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Man on 1B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Man on 1B & 2B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Man on 1B, 2B, 3B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Man on 1B & 3B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Man on 2B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Man on 2B, 3B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Man on 3B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

## Picks

Man on 1B	
To 1B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Man on 2B	
Inside Move	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Outside Move	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Daylight-Inside move	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Daylight-Outside move	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Man on 3B	
to 3B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Man on 1B & 3B	
Fake to 1B, Throw to 3B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

## 1st & 3rds

Straight	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Direct to 3B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Direct to P	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Early Leave (step off)	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

## C Picks

To 1B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
To 2B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
To 3B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

## C Steals

To 2B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
To 3B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

## Team Defense

Rundowns	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Backups	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Relays	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
IF/OF Right of Way Popups	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

## Signs

Offensive Signs	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Defensive Signs	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

## Special Defensive Situations

Double play depth	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Get Lead Runner only	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Passed balls	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Pitch out	<input type="checkbox"/>
4-6-3 single play	<input type="checkbox"/>
5-6-3 double play	<input type="checkbox"/>
6-5 force	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
3-ways - corner IF's	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
6-4-2 single play	<input type="checkbox"/>
Squeeze	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
1st & Third bunt	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

## Baserunning

Primary/Secondary Leads	
From 1B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
From 2B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
From 3B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Steal	
Of 2B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Of 3B	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Steal vs. LHP	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Delay	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Fake Steal/Lunge	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Hit & Run	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
3-2 count steal	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
1st & 3rd Steals	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
R on 1B Reads	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
R. on 2B situations	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
R. on 3B situations	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Passed ball reads	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bunts/squeeze reads	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

## Technique & Plan Instruction

Infielders	Ready Position	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Charge/Breakdown	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Glove Presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outfielders	Get to spot	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Square to throw position	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Square up ground balls	<input type="checkbox"/>
Catchers	Presenting	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Blocking	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Feet/Transfer for throws	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pitchers	Modified slide step	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Looks/Holds	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Fielding technique	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hitters	Less than 2-strike plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
	2-strike plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Bunting	<input type="checkbox"/>

# Soul Throwers

## Common Sense Works in Baseball

By Brooks Hall

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR/SOUL THROWERS

Everyone on the internet is chasing some “hack” to get better at baseball. Like there’s a magic drill... a magic cue... a magic metric... some secret sauce that turns you into an MLB arm overnight.

But here’s the truth nobody wants to hear:

The hack is the simple stuff.

Old-school baseball guys weren’t dumb. They weren’t behind. They just understood reality:

Can you backspin the ball through the zone?  
No? Cool — then let’s get you to throw a true two-seam.  
Now let’s get you shaping a breaking ball slider, sweeper, slurve, whatever fits YOU.

People say: “I wish I had his slider.”  
Yeah bro... everyone does.  
But that guy was born with that slider. God wrote that pitch into his DNA.

That doesn’t mean you can’t reach your ceiling.  
It doesn’t mean you’re capped.  
It means you need to stop chasing someone else’s gifts and master your own.

Getting better is literally this simple:

Work.  
Reps.  
Consistency.  
Repeat.

Just like riding a bike: at first you suck, years later you’re cruising no-hands.  
That’s baseball.  
That’s life.

And yeah injuries happen.  
Life isn’t fair.  
Earth is beautiful and dangerous at the same time.  
But all you can do is do the best with what YOU were given.



**Each month at *The Baseball Collegian*, we will highlight insights from Brooks Hall that can be found on his Soul Throwers Instagram page.**

**Brooks Hall** was drafted in 2009 in the fourth round out of high school, and has spent 13 years pitching professionally with the Brewers, Diamondbacks, Mets, as well as in the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Australia and Taiwan and currently in the Mexican League.

He has joined with Seth Blair, a nine-year pro pitcher and first-rounder from Arizona State, to teach pitching remotely through their training program, Soul Throwers.

*“We take our own approach when it comes to finding the path for you. We start with a full body assessment and then determine your body’s capacity. We find ways to go back to the basics and find a way to turn the brain off and just play. We have more of a holistic approach compared to the industry. Our favorite thing is to throw gas and win on the mound and mold players to do the same thing.*”

*“We’ve helped hundreds of players gain velocity, get rid of anxiety, create confidence they never thought they would have, look at baseball in a different lens, and much much more. We are trying to help people gain perspective on what they are trying to accomplish. We are just helping shape real humans that want to keep playing baseball.”*

**- SoulThrowers.com**

# LEARN THE GAME

Presented by 6-Tool

## What is your Baseball IQ?

Baseball is more than batting averages and strikeouts and diving plays. What makes the game beautiful are the endless situations that players have to be mentally and physically prepared for at a moment's notice, or to put it simply, baseball IQ.

Thing about this though: If a player gets 100 at-bats in a season, the difference between hitting .350 and .250 is 10 hits. However, that's really only about one blooper or grounder that goes through a week.

On the other hand, baseball IQ is utilized all the time, every game, and is way more impactful on the final result. Next time when faced with decisions on starting lineups, think about what will help win the game more - one blooper hit or a full-game of baseball IQ?

Runner will try to score, where should the SS go?



Select an Answer

- Becomes the cutoff
- To second base
- To third base
- Nowhere

Next Question

## Take the Baseball IQ Quiz!

Top of the 6th inning. The score is 1-0 in your favor. The bases are empty with two outs. The count is 0-2 against you. Which adjustment should you make to your plate approach?



A. Choke up slightly on the bat, widen your stance, and eliminate your stride/leg kick to maximize contact and protect the plate.

B. Keep your normal stance but swing harder than usual, aiming for a home run to overcome the two-strike count.

C. Close your stance drastically, look exclusively for an outside fastball, and aim to hit a groundball through the right side of the infield.

D. Take the next pitch, assuming the pitcher will throw a ball to try and get you to chase, then revert to your normal swing.

If the first basemen ended up dropping this popup, the batter would still be out due to the umpire calling an "infield fly".



True

False

Base-running: You're the runner at 1B, and you're the tying run. The ball is hit to deep right centerfield. Where should you be at when the ball is hit?



Select an Answer

No answer selected

Trying to score from first base, rounding third.

Tagging up at first base, trying to advance to second.

On the third base side of second base. In case the OF catches, the runner can retouch second base and get back to 1B.

On the third base side of second base. In case the OF catches, the runner can cut directly across the infield and get back to 1B.

The throw from the center fielder should go to:



Home.

To second base

To third base

**Answer key:**

**Runner will try to score, where should the SS go?** To third base

**Top of the 6th inning. The score is 1-0 in your favor. The bases are empty with two outs. The count is 0-2 against you. Which adjustment should you make to your plate approach?**

A. Choke up slightly on bat, widen your stance, and eliminate your stride/leg kick to maximize contact and protect the plate.

**If the first baseman ended up dropping this popup, the batter would still be out due to the umpire calling an "infield fly."** False

**Base-running: You're the runner at 1B, and you're the tying run. The ball is hit to deep right-centerfield. Where should you be when the ball is caught?** On the third base side of second base. In case the OF catches it, the runner can retouch second base and get back to 1B.

**The throw from the centerfielder should go to:** Third Base.

## TEACH YOUR TEAM THROUGH INTERACTIVE QUIZZES

# The Baseball IQ App

### 6Tool Puts You in Control

- ✓ Get an accurate read on what each player knows
- ✓ Select from over 1,000 questions in the database
- ✓ Create custom questions that fit your team's strategy
- ✓ Send video recordings giving signs to your players
- ✓ Filter questions by categories, positions, and difficulty
- ✓ Easily group players for targeted training

**Are you tired of losing close games due to mental mistakes on the field?**

## Amplify development off the field

[6-TOOL.COM/COLLEGIAN](http://6-TOOL.COM/COLLEGIAN)

## Know your role in every situation

# The Bunting Problem

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

If you never knew anything about bunting, would we actually follow any of the precepts of standard bunting technique?

Let's go through standard bunt technique first, then pose a healthy, successful alternative:

### Barrel angled higher than the hands

If the bat is angled, and the pitch is lower, most people drop the barrel. It's hard to be precise about the correct amount against a fast moving pitch, and in fact, most people drop the barrel below the hands and pop the ball up - the exact reason an angled bat is prescribed in the first place! Also, if it's a low pitch, it's impossible to bend that much and still have the barrel above the hands (even if that was a good idea). Other negatives include the ball coming off the bat spinning sideways, leading to less control and more foul balls.

### Bend a lot in stance

If the pitch is in the higher part of the strike zone, then you will have to move the bat up, and have a greater chance of popping it up. With a lot of bend, hitters will have to adjust either up or down.

### Stand in front of box

This makes pitches higher, which are harder to get on top of. Plus, moving up in the box gives the bunt away to the fielders and pitcher.

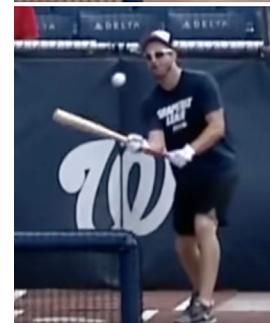
### Hands in front

If the hands are in front of the body, the bat can't cover the plate. Thus, while the ball is moving, they have to move the bat over the plate to bunt pitches right down the middle. If the ball is inside, that will work, except there is a great chance of fouling it off your face, especially if the barrel is higher.



#### RHH Sacrifice

Pivot/Feet locked in  
Bat not balanced  
Barrel above hands



#### RHH Inside Pitch

Can't move feet  
Head close to ball  
Barrel above ball

#### Result:

**Ball fouled off face**



#### RHH Sacrifice

Pivot/Too much bend  
Feet locked in  
Hands together  
No angle  
Barrel above hands



#### RHH Inside Pitch

Too much bend  
Can't move feet  
Head close to ball  
Barrel above hands

#### Result:

**Ball hit him in face**



#### RHH For a Hit

No angle  
Barrel above hands



#### RHH For a Hit

Drops barrel

#### Result:

**Pop-up**

### Bottom hand slide up

This makes balancing the bat very difficult, and thus a lot of dropping the barrel, leading to popups. Also, for pitches middle or out, you have to reach a lot. But more importantly, it means you have to get your head close to the ball, thus the danger of fouling it off your face.

### Pivot

Pivoting your feet in the box doesn't give you any flexibility to move you feet in the box, AND cover home plate. You end up reaching with your arms for outside pitches. Also, more importantly, the feet get locked in, and you can't get out of the way if the ball is thrown inside at you.

### Bunting practice against slow pitching

There is little danger element, and you can usually get away with poor technique like reaching, jabbing, and lots of bat movement. Thus, everyone thinks they are a good bunter. Then in games, this technique doesn't work, the coach gets mad, the player gets shamed, then the player gets mad that he has to bunt, and hopefully, the bad bunt doesn't get fouled off his face

## Fixing the Bunting Problem

Correct bunting technique has to feel safe and actually be safe. That is absolutely the No. 1 most important thing. This is almost a matter of ethics, in putting players in a position to not get injured. If you don't feel safe, how can you possibly do it successfully? Thankfully, the safest technique is also the most successful technique, allowing players to be more consistent, and thus be more confident to bunt.

Thus, here is an alternative to the standard bunting model – a slightly different technique that has been tested and performed successfully for many years at the college level.

Note: This is for right-handed hitters on sacrifice bunts to third base. The same concept applies to all other bunts, except on bunts for hits where the right-handed hitter has a closed stance instead of an open stance.

**Feet slightly open in stance** – This allows you to step away with your right foot to turn the body away if the pitch is inside. It also allows you flexibility to step forward with your left foot if it's low, or towards the plate if it's outside.

**Stand tall & athletic, flat bat at chest** – You only have to move down, not up. You're athletic.

**Left hand close to chest, right arm extended towards first base** - To get there, bring the barrel directly to the correct angle, exactly like a fishing cast motion – no bringing of the barrel around and forward. Bunting is basically all top hand. Hold the bat lightly with your left hand, forcing you to keep the bat flat and extend the right arm. Extending the right arm is imperative to cover the plate with the barrel.

**Flat Bat** - Keeping the bat flat at all times means you won't drop the barrel, which is the biggest problem with bunting. Plus, the ball comes off the bat cleaner with less spin.



**LHH Stance**  
Feet open  
Tall, Athletic  
Angle set  
Flat Bat



**LHH Inside Pitch**  
Body moves, not bat  
Jab Step away/Bend  
Head away from ball  
Flat Bat



**LHH Outside Pitch**  
Body moves, not bat  
Bend  
Head away from ball  
Flat Bat



**RHH Stance**  
Feet open  
Tall, Athletic  
Angle set  
Flat Bat



**RHH For a Hit**  
Feet closed  
Tall, Athletic  
Angle set  
Flat Bat



**RHH Inside Pitch**  
Body moves, not bat  
Jab Step away  
Head away from ball  
Flat Bat



**RHH For a Hit**  
Body moves, not bat  
Jab Step/Bend  
Head away from ball  
Flat Bat

**Don't move the bat - Just the body** – Simply bend down or take a jab step with your feet, or a sway with your body. This allows for athleticism and adjustments to all locations, plus is the safest. You should never have your face near the barrel of the bat, as it puts you at risk of fouling the ball off your face. If the ball is inside, you can step away from the ball. If the ball is outside, you can take a jab step towards the plate (not on it!) and reach the ball. When players lock in their feet, they can only move the bat. When they only move their feet or body, the bat retains its angles for precision.

**Pre-set the angle of the bat** - Point the end of the bat towards first base to bunt to third and don't change that angle. Thus, the ball will simply hit the bat at the intended angle. This also means you won't push forward and bunt it too hard, nor pull back and bunt it too soft, nor foul it off.

## Other Bunting Notes

- DO NOT run before you bunt the ball. That changes the precision and angle of the bat. Placement is everything.
- Bunting for a hit to 1B is very difficult with a small margin for error.
- For sacrifice bunts, square around at pitcher hand break.
- For bunts for hits and squeezes, square around at pitcher release.
- A good mantra is “Perfect or Foul.” Make the bunt perfect near the foul line, or make it foul so your at-bat is not over.

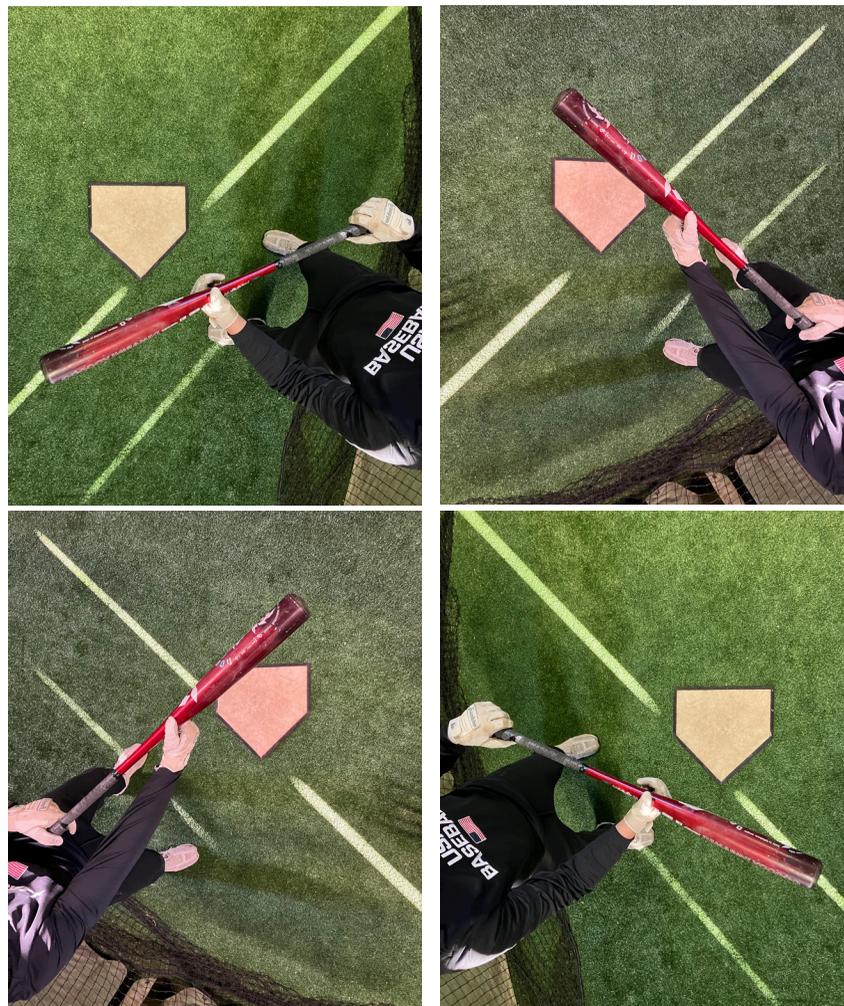
### • Angle Tips

- RHH – Bunt to 3B** Point the end of the bat at 1B.
- RHH – Bunt to 1B** Point the end of the bat at the 1B dugout.
- RHH – Bunt for a hit** Instead of an open stance, use a closed stance, but still stand tall for athleticism and adjustments.

- LHH – Bunt to 3B** Point the end of the bat at the 3B dugout
- LHH – Bunt to 1B** Point the end of the bat at 3B
- LHH – Bunt for a hit** Same as LHH bunt to 3B



## SETTING THE ANGLE



### This technique model results in:

**Safety:** The ball is contacted *always* away from your body, so you are not in danger of fouling a ball off your face.

**Success:** Minimal movement of the bat means more precision. The only movement is the body (feet, legs, torso, shoulders).

Maybe the perception of bunting can change if there is more success. Maybe this can help a lot of players who have no power and are being pushed out of the game. Maybe this will help coaches win more games. Maybe it's not simply a matter of desire, it's a matter of technique.

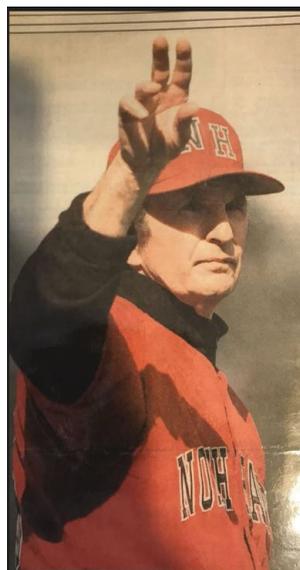
Maybe a major change in how bunting technique is taught and executed will solve the bunting problem that is not as successful and safe as it should be.

# Does Bunting Still Matter?

## Strategy From a Legendary Coach

*Bob DeMayo was the North Haven (Conn.) High School baseball coach for 63 years and recorded 937 wins and five state titles. One of his former players, Frank LaMonaca '75, reports on some of his strategies:*

There is much debate in the game today on the value of bunting. While Coach DeMayo understood that debate, he also argued there is a huge skill gap between the professional game vs. the high school and college game. It was his contention that because pro pitchers, catchers and infielders are such great athletes now, and because they do it every day for a living, it is more difficult to execute a successful bunt at the pro level. But at the high school level, there is a much greater variation in talent, and less defensive practice, and therefore less skill in the infield overall. Thus, Coach preached that if we put the ball in play, we'd put pressure on the opposing team's defense, and good things would happen. Therefore, he believed bunting remained an effective offensive weapon at the high school, and to some extent, the college level.



Courtesy of Bette DeMayo

From Coach's memoir:

"Offensively, one of the techniques I'm known for, I call 'Smart Ball.' Other people around the league call it 'Bobby Ball.' The priests at St. Teresa's called it 'Garbage Ball.' But most others in the game call it 'Small Ball.'

"My philosophy is to never swing at the first pitch. You make the pitcher keep throwing, especially in these days of the pitch count. Be confident that you can be successful going deep in the count. We also used bunting as an effective weapon as well. Essentially, 'Small Ball' is not always going for the first and biggest hit, but rather outplaying and outsmarting the other team over nine innings."

One game during our 22-game winning streak in 1975, we were tied in the bottom of the ninth. Our leadoff hitter doubled. Coach

turned to me on the bench and said, calmly, "This game is over." He then gave the sacrifice bunt sign. One pitch later, our guy was standing on third. Next came the suicide squeeze sign – a play we'd practiced ad nauseum. The runner broke for home at the perfect moment, our batter timed his move perfectly to get a pitch to lay down, and the game-winning run crossed the plate. There had been two pitches from the time Coach said, "This game is over," and it was. It was a classic Coach DeMayo move. Everyone knew what was coming, but he trusted that we would execute the play we'd practiced so many times, and we did.

There is a corollary to the first pitch rule: it was situational. During the 1975 state championship final, we were no-hit entering the bottom of the 8th inning. The opposing pitcher (who had never lost in his high school career and was 25-0!) had given up two hits and was still in command of all his pitches. However, Coach observed that he was tiring, and therefore standing taller on his front leg, and thus his fastball was elevating. As I prepared to lead off the inning, Coach gave specific instructions: "He's still quick, but he's tiring. He'll want to get ahead in the count, and he thinks you'll take the first pitch – so he'll start fastball. So, look first pitch fastball, up in the zone, AND raise your hands up in the zone so you're ready for it. If you get it, go for it." I got it. We went single, sacrifice bunt, single (same instructions), and, suddenly, we were ahead 1-0. Three outs later, their pitcher was 25-1 and we were state champions.

In summary, Coach DeMayo believed high school coaches should think situationally and not just copy the "data-based" strategies of the professional game.

Shortly before he died, Coach and I were watching a Yankee game on TV. A life-long Yankee fan, he told me he felt that the bottom of the Yankee lineup needs to put the ball in play at a much greater frequency. He said, "They'll never win another World Series till the bottom of the line-up reduces their strike-out frequency." It's an interesting, and fair, observation.

## Jeff Smith: The Tools of a Catcher

Jeff Smith has coached catchers for over 25 years as a professional manager and coach. He has over 1,000 wins as a minor league manager, as well as serving as catching coach with the Minnesota Twins under manager Paul Molitor. He is currently the catching coordinator for the Tampa Bay Rays.

Jeff played for Stetson University, as well as three summers for the Orleans Cardinals in the Cape Cod League. He was drafted by the Minnesota Twins and spent nine years playing in the Twins, Red Sox and Rangers systems.

**Collegian** What are some of the most important physical movements that a catcher has to do? I know you have to throw well, block well, receive well, but what are their movements that make a good catcher?

**Jeff Smith** I'm going to preface this as a player that played 10 years in the minor leagues, a guy that's instructed for over 25 years, and a guy that's been with the Twins as a major league and minor league catching instructor and for three years now in Tampa as a catching coordinator. I have been through three complete generational cycles in catching. When I started, it was drop the glove pre-pitch, and then it went to a quarter turn, and now it's all the way to the ground. All of them are pretty much very similar in a sense of staying underneath the ball. We're still relaxing the wrist. We're still getting to a spot with a goal of beating the ball to the spot. For movement patterns, you can start with hip mobility, which is still a very, very important thing. Hamstring and back flexibility go in to mobility. Also, having good strength and movements in the left wrist and left arm. And when you have those movements, then you get to the advanced stage of making good quality movements as fast as possible.

**Collegian** Isn't it almost overwhelming how pro catchers are able to withstand the velocity?

**Jeff Smith** Yes. I think it amazes us catching instructors too, because we're seeing catchers pocket balls, have the strength to make moves, have the strength to stop balls, have the strength to bring balls left, right, up, down – not at 80 miles an hour, but at pitches going 100 miles an hour, or sliders that are going 92, or split fingers that are going 91, or high fastballs with 20+ inches of carry. You must really give so much credit to these catchers. Their eyesight, their recognition, their strength, and most of all, just the work ethic of catchers these days. Every catcher wants to be able to slow the game down. And you slow down the game enough to do this with 100 mile-an-hour pitches with over and over repetition. You want to be the one that catches the bullpens, as

every time you catch pitches of high velocity, you're slowing things down. And eventually, that 100 is going to keep going slower and slower with your eyesight. It's a special breed for sure.

**Collegian** We're talking athleticism, but I'm also curious about practicing these skills. What do you need to do daily?

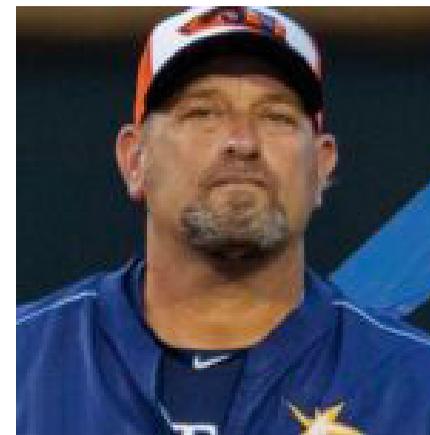
**Jeff Smith** For drills, it's kind of like you're doing ball handling in basketball. It's like infielders doing repetitions every day. It's not one of these things where you're just going to do two or three days a week and do it for an hour. You will get better a lot faster if you do 15-30 minutes daily where you touch receiving, you touch throwing, you touch blocking. Spend 15-30 minutes a day at your craft, you will get better at something. It involves some strength training of your left arm, forearm, wrist and shoulder.

The true definition of a block is not letting the runner advance 90 feet.

It may involve quickness. But what it really comes back to is just learning how to pocket the ball and catch the ball correctly with movement and velocities. And that's kind of where it all starts. But the more someone trains daily at a smaller amount of time is always going to outweigh just once or twice a week with long periods of time. Because your eyes have to match your hands.

**Collegian** A tricky thing is how to do daily catching drills without beating your body down every day.

**Jeff Smith** Catchers are a special fraternity. And it just becomes part of your daily life. You want it, your mind wants it, your body wants it, and it just makes you so much better. Even if you're just doing receiving daily, even if you're just doing it and adding a little throw, a little whatever, you're going to be feeling confident. When you get back there and you want to slow down the game, feeling confident is where it all starts. And the only way to feel confidence really is to feel good. There's a lot of repetition



and feeling good at what you do, and it's just that daily routine of 15-30 minutes that is going to make that difference. And you could do it on both knees, on the left knee, on the right. You could do it in traditional stance, you can do it on a bucket. There's all different ways that catchers catch. The more your eyes sync up with that glove and the ball, the better you're going to be in the long run.

**Collegian** A hard thing I found in coaching was how to get catchers practice reps on game day. In pro baseball, they're playing every day. When do they practice? How long? What do they do? What's a good plan?

**Jeff Smith** For our routines, we're doing receiving, throwing, blocking routines just the same thing as shortstops getting ground balls – it's no different. If you're not starting, you might do it during BP or right before BP. The starting catcher is going to do his routine right before he catches his first pitch in the bullpen. If a fan wants to see a pro catcher work, the best time is 45 minutes before the game starts. In the bullpen, you will see all kinds of different routines, anywhere from hip mobility to stretching to some type of receiving drills, then blocking drills and then some footwork and exchange drills. Then he's ready to catch for that night, but also keeping him sharp all season long.

### Want to learn more from Jeff?

Access over 150 teaching clips through Jeff's courses  
Jeff is also available for individual video analysis.  
[espinosa-online.com/online-private-lessons/](https://www.espinosa-online.com/online-private-lessons/)

**Collegian** Do you have any go-to drills that you would put into that little session?

**Jeff Smith** In general, it all starts with getting your hands ready. It could be catching plyo balls and sticking it. It could be something with a heavy glove. It could be something barehand with baseballs or light balls to get your hands and eyes going. You let your hand work underneath the baseball, then you go right to your glove, maybe with some fastballs, maybe some bounce drills. The biggest thing before you start making your moves in all four sectors is to feel the ball hit the pocket a bunch. Then you go to your left or right knee down or if you're a kickstand guy, whatever stances you're going to use, and work your four zones. Then guys like to feel the ball off the chest protector a little bit on some blocks. You like to see ball spin and and do some recognition drills. Is it in the air? Is it going in the dirt? And then at the end, how it feels from side to side with that and then go to some transfers. Get the hand on the baseball. Go from your glove to your hand, and end up with a little footwork, and then you're ready to go. Because I think one thing that everybody forgets, the first ball receiving, the first block you make, the first throw you make, may dictate that whole game. And if you're not ready... Maybe the most important thing to do is to prepare you for that first time.

**Collegian** I would always tell my guys to create a daily routine that they need to own every day. But in the rush of game day, it would often get lost and not done enough.

**Jeff Smith** Right. There are so many things that partners do without a coach. I'm a huge believer in the most valuable and best players are the ones that do things when no coach is watching. You go to a college game and there's four catchers in the bullpen with no coach, doing drills back and forth. They're doing stuff together. So I think the process of getting better is really important.

I don't like moving the ball all the time. I like to look at it as applying an opposite force to where the ball is going.

**Collegian** It's kind of becoming more and more realized how profound catching is. It requires such an athleticism and it's where the action is – Home plate.

**Jeff Smith** There's no place where you are so involved in the action, every single play. And there's also probably no position on the field where you can make such a difference in a pitcher's career in development, too. You're developing yourself, but just the difference you can make on your teammate's career is so cool to do too. There's so many good things.

**Collegian** Let's talk about receiving. What are your thoughts about knee on the ground receiving?

**Jeff Smith** Looking back at my career as a catcher coach, when it first started, I was obviously a traditional guy. It was knees out, or knees in for big guys so they can get down. Anybody that's done it a long time, it took them a little time to understand and believe and see what we're going to do with it. But once you understood the knee down, you just saw the value of it. And it took all of us a different time period to understand that. Anybody that says catchers go knee down to save hips and knees – that is a false statement. because you are more intense. Maybe some of the pressure is no longer on your left knee, right knee, but maybe the pressure is added on your lower back or lower on different parts of your body. But the intensity level is just as much. Basically, when you go down to a knee, you do have a lot more freedom on your left elbow and ability to use your glove. A lot of time in a traditional stance, their elbow might get stuck with their left knee. When you put a left knee down, the knee is out of place. So a lot of times now, your glove has full freedom of the strike zone. And No. 2, your eye level is in the strike zone a lot more. It does keep you a lot quieter. And No. 3, it gives the umpire a very clear, clean look at the strike zone.

**Espinosa**  
BASEBALL

**ACCESS ANYTIME.**  
**ANYWHERE**

ONLINE VIDEO COURSES

Expert instruction from **Joe Espinosa, Perry Hill, Juan Nieves and Jeff Smith**  
A video toolbox for coaches of all levels.

**Courses:** Hitting, Pitching, Catching, and Infield

Courses for Coaches, Instructors, and Players of all ages and levels

**Enroll Now:** [espinosa-online.com](http://espinosa-online.com)



Courses starting at  
**\$99**  
Train on your schedule.  
Build real skills.

**Collegian** With blocking on one knee, is it harder to block balls to the side when the knee is down?

**Jeff Smith** I've actually seen guys block better with left and right knee down. And there's a few reasons why it's comparable or better. A lot of times, everybody will notice the one block that gets away. The catcher might have just blocked 10 balls, but it might be the one crazy pitch that gets away. And it's always blamed on the knee down. We all get it as catching instructors. But the good thing on left knee/right knee is blocking all starts with recognition, being engaged, and anticipation. But when your left knee or right knee is down and your glove is on the ground, you are in a position already close to the ground where you can slide left or right and you don't have to drive your knees down. You are very close. And your decision making between the block and the catch, becomes easier for you. And that's what you really want – to make your decision-making process between the catch and the block as easy as possible.

**Collegian** You mentioned starting with the glove at the bottom of the zone. What is the main purpose of that?

**Jeff Smith** I talked earlier about seeing all three generational cycles of catching that I've been through for pre-pitch. Relax the hand down, quarter turn, and now, glove to the ground. All are in the same concept of staying underneath the baseball because we want to keep our thumb underneath the ball – we never want the glove to go down or have that perception. We want to always bring the lowest balls up into the zone. And when you talk pitch framing, it's kind of a lost concept. It's not always about gaining strikes. The main purpose of pitch framing is not losing any strikes. It's not gaining the strikes. Catchers cannot afford to lose strikes. Whatever we can gain, that's a bonus.

**Collegian** I like that perspective shift. What I haven't been able to solve in my mind is the concept that while having your glove down is really good for the low pitch, it seems bad for the high pitch.

**Jeff Smith** You'll see a lot of guys do it a little different. Some guys like to start all the way down on the high pitch. Some guys just start at the bottom of the strike zone. Some guys keep it at their chest or belly button where the pitch is going to be. A guy may not always go to the same spot down if they're calling a high pitch, so there are some variances based on pitch location.

**Collegian** My teams threw a lot of high fastballs on purpose, and it felt like it was just a long way to go.

**Jeff Smith** Right. And a lot of teams in Major League Baseball throw a lot of high fastballs. Some guys keep their posture where they have quick enough hands to do that. It's kind of a preference. And it's also based on a pitcher's command too. In



high school or college or coming up, guys command might be scattered all over the place. You just don't know where it's going to go.

**Collegian** Framing has changed so much. It used to be about being ultra still and letting it come to you. Now it seems like a 180-degree reversal. We used to make fun of people that would take pitches out of the zone and snatch them in the zone. Is this helping or hurting?

**Jeff Smith** So look at it as a kind of perspective as a whole. The concept of framing has not changed on a philosophy level. Our job as catchers is to make

The main purpose of pitch framing is not losing any strikes. It's not gaining the strikes. Catchers cannot afford to lose strikes. Whatever we can gain, that's a bonus.

sure all strikes stay strikes. And No. 2 is to hopefully make sure we do the best we can to get pitches that are close. Maybe we can have an influence on that. Whether you were a catcher with little movement or doing what framing has become now, all catchers are just applying an opposite force to the way the ball is going. And so I don't look at it as major movements. I don't like moving the ball all the time. I like to look at it as applying an opposite force to where the ball is going. That's kind of where it all starts. Guys are teaching it from 12U all the way up. When guys first went to knee-down and glove down to the ground, it was a change for pitchers too, in terms of what they see with their eyes. But now guys are getting it. No one even notices it anymore. If a pitcher doesn't like that, you have to say, let's talk about it and be comfortable. Because that's our job as a catcher – to make that guy as comfortable as possible.

**Collegian** I heard Bobby Valentine in a clinic say that he went to Japan to coach, and all the catchers were using their glove to block instead of their bodies. I haven't heard anyone else say something like that before. But he started to come around on that idea.

### Catcher's Pre-Game Routine

Get hands ready & ball in pocket  
Plyo balls, sticks,  
barehand, light balls  
Get in stance & work four zones  
Ball off chest protector  
Read spin, recognition  
Side to side blocks  
Transfers

**Jeff Smith** It's funny because what Bobby said right there is a lot more true today than it's probably ever been. Really. But that does not mean that you are blocking without your body. It just means that when you're in a knee-down stance, you may not have the same range as you might in a traditional stance. You're always going to go after the block first. However, once it gets outside of your range, you are basically in a catching world where you're going to be doing either a pick or a paddle, and that is keeping it in front. Like Bobby Valentine said, you are going to be keeping your glove face pretty much open and now it becomes an extension of your blocking body.

**Collegian** That explains the concept.

**Jeff Smith** Catches are amazing at it. What really is the definition of a block? It's not hitting your chest protector, it's not hitting your glove. The true definition of a block is not letting the runner advance 90 feet. That is the true definition of a block.

**Collegian** How can a catcher practice leadership or develop leadership?

**Jeff Smith** It's such a skill. We spend a lot of time on leadership. And there are a lot of different ways to lead. There are quiet leaders, vocal leaders, different kinds. But No. 1, I think of the work ethic. Doing things the right way is the start of leadership. And No. 2 is wanting to make your pitchers better and wanting them to be as successful as possible. And also, having the complete confidence of managers, your coaches, and your team. That is just from all the preparation and work that you do basically over time that gets noticed. You are the person that is involved in everything. So if you are underprepared, if you are not willing to make your pitcher better, that leadership aspect is going to be something you're going to need to work on. But if you're the guy that's always over-prepared, always wanting to make your pitchers better, always wanting to have a work ethic, then that quiet leadership comes out and then your personality kind of intermixes with that part.

# THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

## PITCHING PROJECT



### A Non-Partisan Resource on Pitching

**THE INTENT OF THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN PITCHING PROJECT** is to inform coaches and players and parents of some of the many theories on being a successful pitcher.

Most every concept has advocates with very strong opinions on either side of the argument. Too often, a theory is chosen based on popularity, conventional wisdom, or because someone famous does it that way, as opposed to one's own analysis. With so many contradicting theories, it is essential to have an understanding of all of the possible options before deciding which one to commit to.

These pitching theories are presented without judgment, without confirmation bias, with no preconceptions, and without dogma or commercialism. In turn, the strong hope is that people are inspired to do the work to make up their own mind based on as much information as possible – and in turn, do what makes most sense to them.

Last month, the discussion was about whether curveballs are healthy to throw. This month, the discussion turns to which side of the rubber to throw off.

### Q. Which side of the rubber should you throw off?

#### General Belief:

- **Arm side** Guy Hansen - A Baseball Guy (2016)

A relatively recent development has been the idea that right-handed pitchers should throw from the left side of the rubber and left-handed pitchers should throw from the right side of the rubber. Do I think this is the way to go?

Definitely not. I believe that for pitchers it hinders deception – a seriously undervalued aspect of pitching – and leads to weak lower body action and mild to extreme across the body direction in the delivery, both of which can lead to performance issues and to physical issues, including injuries caused by undue strain on the arm and shoulder.

#### Other Philosophies:

- **Glove Side** Perry Husband – The Science of Pitch Sequencing – Book 3

The slider seems to move less when you move over (to the glove side), but the reality is that the movement is the same, it is now just going against the grain and appears to be less. It sets up the fastball up and inside (to a RHH), change-up down and in, and slider, to all be in the same flight path for 20 feet. This idea of moving to a point on the rubber where more pitches share a line to the 20-foot mark is the very easiest and smartest place to start. Many major league pitchers have made adjustments using this approach with huge success.

The 12-to-6 curveball is easier developed using this concept of moving to a point on the rubber, where you are throwing against the grain.



• **Either Side** Leo Mazzone – Pitch Like a Pro

Tom Glavine stands on the third-base side of the rubber when he pitches – even though conventional wisdom teaches that left-handed pitchers stand on the first-base side and right-handed pitchers stand on the third-base side.

So what the heck is Glavine, a lefty, doing on the third-base side? His fastball sinks and fades. His change-up fades. He wants to start on the third base side of the rubber to catch more of the plate and to give him the proper angle to the right-handed hitter.

The lesson here is that you can't generalize about where to stand on the mound. You have to experiment to determine what's going to work best for your personal style of pitching.

• **Either Side** Derek Johnson, *The Complete Guide to Pitching* (2013)

Another interesting strategy that has become popular recently is using the drag mark for the pitcher's back foot as a "tell" or signal for where the pitcher should start on the rubber. In this strategy, if the drag mark goes to the middle of the plate, the pitcher is on the correct side of the rubber because the drag line is a remnant of the pitcher's line to the plate. If the drag line goes away from home plate, the pitcher should move until his mark lines up properly. I have used this method with pitchers for the past year or two and believe it is a good starting point; however, other questions about ball movement and command of the pitcher still need to be answered. In other words, it is a great place to start, but not necessarily an absolute!

• **Either Side** Steve McCatty - Nationals Pitching coach

Matt Grace and Blake Treinen are just two pitchers in the Nationals organization who have moved along the rubber, a change that Steve McCatty believes can be helpful but is not "a career-changer." In his nine major-league seasons pitching for the Oakland Athletics, he said he tried moving all over the rubber with little effect. Sometimes, he would have to move simply because another pitcher had been throwing from the same spot, tearing up that part of the mound.

In the end, standing on the rubber is as much about comfort as tangible effects. If a pitcher believes it helps, he will have confidence pitching from a certain spot. And with that confidence, he might have more success. ([washingtontimes.com](http://washingtontimes.com))

• **Either Side (for a sinker)** Scott Johnson - Fangraphs

The efficiency is the same, no other way to put it, which is the beauty of statistics and sabermetrics. ([fangraphs.com](http://fangraphs.com))

# MAKING IT HOME

## Life Lessons from a Season of Little League-Part 2

By TERESA STRASSER

AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK, *MAKING IT HOME*

Nate's been pitching in the yard before school. Along the side of our house, a wooden fence separates us from our neighbor, leaving a narrow lane between the house and the fence. My husband measures out the correct distance—forty-six feet for Little League Minors—puts down a plastic mat for a makeshift home plate, another for the pitcher's mound, and then he squats behind the plate to receive each pitch as it comes down the pike, calling balls or strikes against an imaginary batter.

This morning, Nate stops. "Hey, Dad?"

"When I look at you the whole time during my delivery, I throw more strikes."

"What have you been looking at?" asks his dad, who has missed this one small detail in the bevy of body movements that make up a pitch.

Nate slows down his motion, reenacting it. A left-hander's body faces first base—in this case, the side of our house—before initiating delivery. He holds the ball in his left hand, cradling it like a baby held low. He turns his head to look at his dad, his body still facing imaginary first base. He cranks up his right knee. His hands separate, the gloved hand going toward his target, his dad's catcher's mitt. His ball hand stretches back as his body weight moves forward. He draws his elbow back, like an archer, and then flashes the ball to the batter as his front foot lands. His throwing arm comes forward, trailing his leg by just a fraction of a second, flinging the ball toward the strike zone, arcing forward in a rainbow. After the ball is released, his left leg comes all the way around, parallel to the other, so his hips, shoulders, head, everything, are facing forward, squared off, ready to field a ball.

"I've been looking at first."

"Oh no," says his dad. "You should always be looking at the catcher. Keep your eyes on the target no matter what your body is doing."

Coach says that's pretty much an ironclad rule when it comes to Little League pitching. Maybe it's even true for major leaguers. Fernando Valenzuela was a notable exception. He would look up for a moment during his windup, a very unorthodox delivery that somehow worked for him. I only know this because my brother had a poster of Valenzuela Scotch-taped to his bedroom wall. The

left-handed Dodger from Mexico looked pudgy and jovial, his lead leg lifted all the way to his elbow, gathering himself to hurl his other-worldly screwball toward the plate, eyes lifted toward the heavens.

Nate holds his gaze steady toward his dad's glove.

They go through a few more counts against invisible opponents, some balls, but mostly strikes.

"You just struck out two batters," Daniel says, in the measured tone of a guy temperamentally suited to being a Little League dad.

Things are looking up for Nate in the bullpen that is the narrow patch of dirt along our fence, but irrational exuberance is not his coach's style, nor is taking his eye off the ticking clock on a school day. "One more, Dad. One more," Nate begs. But it's time for breakfast, and Coach rises from his squat, removes his glove.

"My arm feels good today," Nate tells me over oatmeal, in a rare tell-Mom-a-thing-I-feel moment. My breath catches in my sternum for a second.

I look sidelong at Daniel, who is rinsing a dish at the sink. He raises his eyebrows, tilts his head to the side, but doesn't look up. "Yup," he says, nodding and rinsing. "Looking good."

"My arm feels good today," Nate tells me over oatmeal, in a rare tell-Mom-a-thing-I-feel moment.

Nate isn't a leadoff hitter, doesn't quite have the wheels, but tonight Coach is mixing things up. Despite his recent mishaps at the plate, Nate is just as likely to put the ball in play as anyone else. Before stepping into the box, he takes a practice swing, and I know he's working to keep the bat nice and level, like his dad taught him. He steps into his stance, taps the bat on the plate, swings the bat all the way around, toward the pitcher and over his head in a circle, taps the plate with the bat again, and then rocks back and forth until his weight is centered, his cleats parallel.

The first pitch is a ball. He doesn't swing. Good eye.

On the second pitch, he gets under it, makes contact, and launches the ball into the air toward center field. There's a very particular sound when the sweet spot of an aluminum bat hits the leather, cork, and rubber that make up a baseball. "You hear that?" my dad says when Nate hits it square. "I love that sound." It's a sharp thwack, something you take in more like echolocation than hearing, the bat flexing and vibrating, the acoustics of two solid objects connecting in exactly the right place.

But this isn't that sound. It's dull and flat. It's a hollow,

three-quarter echo of that sound.

“DROP. DROP. DROP.” We can will the ball to drop; if we chant, in unison, the ball will drop. Maybe we shouldn’t, because it’s embarrassing, but we can’t help ourselves. I clutch my jade necklace for luck, because I know I can help this weak hit somehow land where a fielder isn’t. The moment I hear the sound, the aluminum hitting the ball, sending it out, I know that I control how fast and how far it travels and whether it finds a spot to drop. In that fraction of a second, when I clutch the pendant hanging on a chain around my neck, I believe in God, I believe in angels, I believe dead people are angels looking out for me, I believe in the indescribable embrace of Jesus and his love-light, I believe my dead mom, who never cared about baseball, is taking a pause from some heavenly game of bridge to see to it that this goes right for me. Forget letting be. Forget the here and now, my toes, the dirt, the earth. Forget meditating in my closet, letting life unfold, accepting and being present. I’m as far away as I can be, in the phony afterlife of cheap figurines and basic-cable mediums, chugging a bottomless cup of crave. In that slice of time, between contact and landing, I set aside all the things I secretly know to be true: that when you’re dead, you’re dead; maybe when people think of you there’s some sort of momentary reawakening of your essential being in the atmosphere, but basically you’re gone, nighty night and shalom; and angels are just nice people who are repairing cleft palates in war-torn countries or working at food banks here on Earth, not prancing around looking like Stevie Nicks in the afterlife, wearing feathers and wings. But for this pause in the space-time continuum,

angels are dead ancestors on puffy clouds listening to actual harp music. My mom is peering down over her bridge hand, through the clouds, aware that Nathaniel James has just made contact with a baseball and things might not go his way, so of course she has the power to bend the wind, or the Earth, or the left fielder’s arm. My brother is up there, hearty and whole. He doesn’t have cancer and he doesn’t have the yips, but he does have divine superpowers. For the thin sliver of time when the outcome is up in the air, I’d swear angels exist. I’d pay to have my aura photographed and my palm read. When it’s time to control the world for my kid, I’m one hundred percent that bitch.

DAMN.

Caught by the third baseman, who smugly returns it to the pitcher. I knew heaven was bullshit.

“Oh for one,” I whisper to my dad.

“What was that?” he says to me out of the side of his mouth. We both keep facing the game, faking it, acting like we actually care about the next batter.

“This is a disaster, Dad. His timing is way off. Still.”

“This is a disaster, Dad. His timing is way off. Still.”

“Disaster,” Dad repeats.

“Disaster,” Dad repeats, talking like a trailer-park ventriloquist, mouth barely moving. He takes off his knit cap, holds it gently in his lap, looks at the traffic on Camelback Road, swigs his Diet Pepsi.

We are holding out hope for his next at bat.

The first two innings were so painfully slow, they ate up most of the time. By our calculations, Nate will get only one more turn at bat.

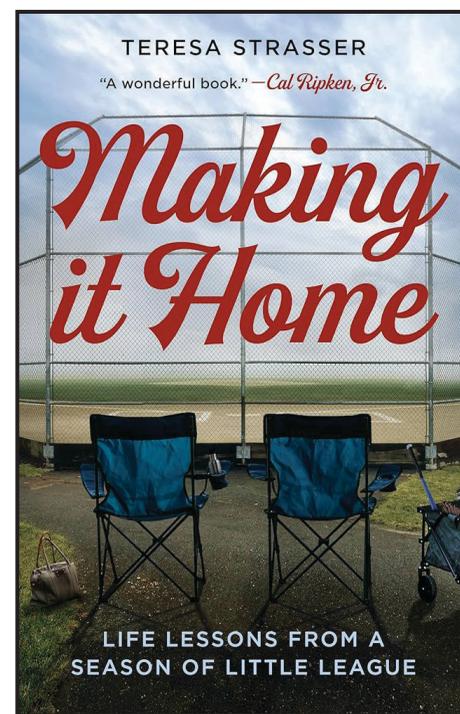
When Nate steps up to the plate, he takes an overeager big hack at the first pitch, which is so high,

it’s at his eyeline. He swings so hard he turns himself around, like a screw going into the ground. He collects himself, looks toward his coach. “Wait for your pitch. Lay off the high stuff,” says Coach Daniel casually, spitting sunflower seeds into the dirt. On the next pitch, Nate is way out in front. Down two strikes in the count, he keeps his eye on the ball and doesn’t swing at a high one. But the ump calls it a strike, and he goes down looking.

“Oh for two,” mutters my dad. We shake our heads, roll our eyes. We sit in silence. And more silence.

“I lost my son to cancer, but this is the worst thing that’s ever happened,” he murmurs. This is a green-sheet joke, dark and wrong and something only we could understand as not true and absolutely true. He lets out a huge guffaw when he sees the words register on my face, dabs his eyes with his blue bandana. Then the reality hits us. It’s just not fucking funny. No majestic line drive to discuss the next day. No clever base running where Nate comes out the victor. No sweet sound of a shot coming off Nate’s red aluminum USA Baseball-sanctioned bat for us to hear in our heads as our heads hit our pillows, for us to parse the next day on the phone as we review the game. Nothing good. Fortunately I can cheer my dad up by sharing my inside information, conspiratorially, as Nate hits the dugout, registering no emotion on his young face but hanging his head low as he removes his helmet, shakes out his hair, and checks his outfield assignment on a clipboard hanging from a nail by the door.

“Dad, Coach promised Nate an inning on the mound tonight, because friends from his school are on Team Turquoise.” My dad’s



eyes get wide. Then he remembers. I see him blink away the specter of the yips. “Danny worked with him, Pops.”

“He did?”

“Yup. And this morning, Nate told me his arm felt good. And he never says anything like that.”

“He did?”

I say, “Look,” as Nate heads toward the mound purposefully, with his bouncy, flat-footed heel-toe swagger.

“Even with my bad eyes, even with everyone in their uniforms, I can always tell when it’s Natey. He has that shuffle.” I can hear him add, Same as Mugsy, in the silent conversation we’re having and not having as Nate throws a few practice pitches.

“Balls in,” yells the catcher. And all I want is to get the fuck out. UNPLEASANT.

Get ahold of yourself; it’s one inning. They are children. The outcome doesn’t matter. Be present. Enjoy the process. Just like Victoria said, “All sensations change if we let them be.” Isn’t it a beautiful night to be watching Little League?

UNPLEASANT.

I chew my thumbnail. I have a searing feeling between my lower ribs, like I just ate a thousand Flaming Hot Cheetos and then swallowed one of those novelty punching-nun toys, which is socking it to my solar plexus from the inside.

Victoria would be pissed if I missed the fundamental point she made in the drafty auxiliary chapel of that giant church in Scottsdale.

The only thing to do is rip open a bag of sunflower seeds with your teeth and make yourself uncomfortable, because there’s nowhere to run when you’re a pitcher’s mom. You can’t escape it hiding behind the snack bar or watching between your fingers, and maybe you shouldn’t even try. After the six-week course ended, I continued sporadically attending her weekly dharma talks at the church, sermons on karma, suffering, attachment. “Approach, don’t avoid,” she’d say.

There’s ancient Buddhist wisdom; then there’s the anxiety of a grieving Little League mom and her broken-down old dad, and the two of us can’t handle any more wild pitches.

I slap a placid look on my face like No big deal, my kid’s got this, and if he doesn’t, so what?

When Nate throws his first pitch, he has his eyes on the catcher’s glove all the way, start to finish, the hitch in his windup having been ironed out by these school-day mornings in our makeshift

bullpen. Nate throws fourteen pitches in that inning. There are no base runners. There no walks or hits. He throws nine strikes, five balls. And on the third strike of the third batter, he allows himself one subtle fist pump and half a smile.

Game over.

We pack up and Grandpa heads toward his meditation cushion, a molded plastic saddle beneath the green sheet. It may not be pretty or proper, but the old man is keeping the rust at bay. A roof is a roof is a cover is a home is a tin can next door to a mortuary is a place to be until the next inning, the next night rolling home, a toothless poem shooting through a sketchy neighborhood, rounded over his handlebars. He’s a kind of poem to me now, because the cyclist pedaling through the blackness is happy and sad at the same time, seeing two boys. One lefty slugger is just ashes, a Ziploc baggie of dust shoved in a shoebox in the closet where I meditate on the magnitude of his loss, and the other slugger—the image

the old man also now holds in his mind, holds tight, knuckles fully flexed—has freckles across his nose and allows himself one restrained pump of his fist, and Grandpa sees that fist as he turns onto the bike path from Thomas Road, heading downhill, rising from his seat, coasting, past the fishing pond where the salty air fills his nose, and the Continental Villas, and the back of Oscar’s Taco Shop, closed for the night, the sombrero over the O barely visible.

If you hear the sound of my dad’s screams bouncing off some trees in the desert, it’s okay. He’s getting from point A to point B through the park on a path he can barely see.

As we head home, singing along to “Old Town Road” on the radio, I wonder if my dad will scream out into this night or laugh maniacally. Will two of his favorite sluggers be sitting next to each other in the dusty, dark dugout that is the no-man’s-land of a grieving grandpa in the afterglow of a lights-out pitching performance by the lefty who lives?

I don’t know about his ride home, but when I check my phone later, I have a text from my dad.

As I read it, I know his feet are crossed, kicked up in thick gray socks, resting on the pleather recliner that came with the place. He’s wearing his navy knit cap, sipping a reasonably sized shot of cheap tequila he picked up at Circle K on the way home, and I know he doesn’t even need his little space heater to keep him warm tonight as he taps out a text with his pinky.

Struck out the side.

“Get ahold of yourself; it’s one inning. They are children. The outcome doesn’t matter. Be present. Enjoy the process.”

**Teresa Strasser is an Emmy-winning writer (Comedy Central), Emmy-nominated television host (TLC), and Los Angeles Press Club Columnist of the Year. She’s been on The View, Good Morning America, and co-host to the Adam Carolla podcast. Her book, *Making it Home*, is available wherever books are sold.**

## A Coaching Journey with Video

By **MARK WOODWORTH**  
EDITOR/THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

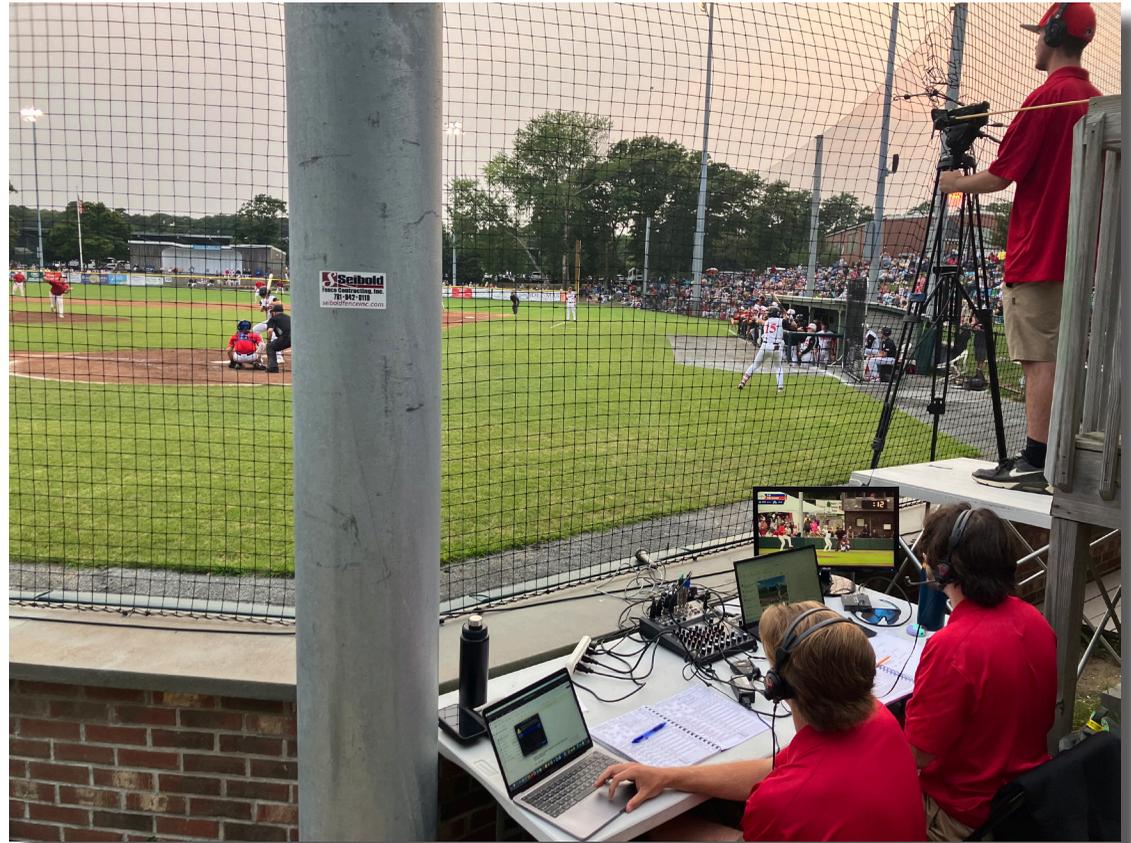
I think my college baseball team broke more than 30 tripods this century. Not bats – tripods.

All baseball coaches know by now that there is more to the profession than just writing lineups and calling for hit-and-runs. In addition to fundraising, field maintenance, travel planning and equipment ordering, it's time to include video.

It has absolutely been a journey with video over the years. When I started, VHS tapes and big camcorders were the thing – now we can do it on our phones.

My original starting point 25 years ago was that something was always better than nothing. Football was pretty much the only sport filming, but I figured, if it was important to them, it could be important to me. The feedback and learning possibilities of film are well established now, but it wasn't too long ago that it was relatively novel and deemed less important.

Not that getting the video was a piece-of-cake. Filming hitters in the batting cage was the easiest. Next was indoor scrimmages, followed by recording outside games. Not so simple though: Tripods left at fields or in trunks of players' cars happened way too much. Extension cords were exhausting. Setting up the correct location and what should be in the screen was always a task. Archiving the video was painstaking – labels and shelves for VHS tapes, buying burners and cases for DVD's, external hard drives for storage space for video files.



Besides the use for individual instruction, game videos were essential to capture highlights. Just turn on the video and let it roll – something great will happen for our season-ending highlight tape! Sounds simple. Video should be the last thing on a coach's mind on game day. But I can't tell you how many times I was setting up the tripod or running to the backstop to press record as the first pitch was being thrown, or handling a video crisis from someone assigned to take care of it. You'd think with 30 players on the bench, and even more parents and fans, someone would be game to do it, but apparently it's not so simple. When a trusted staff member took ownership of the video from beginning to end, I finally was free to do my coaching on the field, and, after the game in the office.

One day, I heard about webcasts in their nascent stages. In the quest to help the players get better in small ways, I received permission from our S.I.D. to talk to our school's IT department about broadcasting a game live. They went to work on it – I do remember the whole idea almost fell apart when they determined their servers couldn't handle more than 50 live streams at a time. Thankfully, our first live webcast didn't have that many viewers, and thus was born our athletic department's live game video initiative, which has now turned into broadcasting all home games live in all 30 sports (as do most college programs).

That has become a full production process, but there was still a gap – especially in baseball. Video was hard with all kinds of different field setups, tournaments, neutral-site games, nobody to be an in-game producer. One solution I found was in Little League. Our town had a 24/7 live streaming video camera on the fence behind home plate – for a coach watching their kids while on the road with their own team was incredible.

That inspired me to broadcast my small college games on our spring trip. No one was doing it – surprisingly no one still does. It was work – tripod, extension cords, chargers, shielding the sun,

setting it up, and even one broken iPad due to the wind (or maybe poor tripod placement?) But it was instrumental to our program for alums and parents and players around the country to see what was going on in real time. Our small college averaged 150 viewers, but for those 150 viewers, it might as well as have been the Super Bowl.

Broadcasting spring trip games quickly became an assumed element of our program, thus no going back. But I learned something throughout this quarter-century experience. While recording baseball videos started primarily as an instructional tool, the benefits became far greater. I believe offering the immediate live game experience, as well as being able to re-live the game later, yielded great dividends in demonstrating our program's commitment to providing a great experience. The players loved the instant feedback, the parents and families loved seeing their kids play (whether they were there or not), and alums and random fans were able to be dedicated followers.

Baseball video is a part of the landscape now, and a broken tripod here or there is worth it for coaches and programs on so many levels.

**Do you still need a video system for your field?**

# SPORFIE

**Smarter Streaming & Replay.**  
**Better Game Coverage.**



- ✓ **AI Camera Switching** for broadcast-style streams
- ✓ Live streaming to Sporfie & external platforms
- ✓ Cloud recorded content viewable on demand
- ✓ **Instant Replay** with no limit of cameras/angles
- ✓ Audio commentary with mobile/external mic
- ✓ Monetization via fundraising and sponsorships
- ✓ Public API for scheduling and analytics
- ✓ **Installation and equipment included**

**sporfie.com/baseball | contact@sporfie.com**

**The Baseball Collegian**  
424 Matson Hill Rd.  
S. Glastonbury, CT 06073

# THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

## Do You Really Need Confidence?

*"The experience others call confidence you experience as being at ease, fully yourself and not self-conscious but rather task conscious."*

-- Augusten Burroughs

People are always searching for confidence. We want to feel confident in order to perform.

But we're actually at our most confident when we're not thinking about whether we are or are not confident.

We're at our best when we're focused on something other than ourselves and our thoughts.

I love the way Augusten Burroughs talks about confidence.

"Trying to feel confident will actually make you anxious," he says.

"Instead of thinking about confidence, what you need to do is focus on exactly what's happening in the instant. Not even the whole moment; the



instant at hand. When you're on a date or in a meeting or wherever it is you need to be seen as confident or wish you had 'confidence,' this is the tool to pull from the box and use: be where you are when you're there, doing whatever it is you're doing. Engage with someone and focus on

them, not on your own self, not wondering how focused you are or how much time has passed."

The best pitchers in baseball go to the mound and put their entire focus on the pitch they are about to throw. They aren't focused on how they feel, they are focused on executing the pitch they are about to throw.

That same thing can be applied to any area of your life.

Today, when you feel you need confidence, try instead to be so focused on the task at hand or be so involved with

listening to the person you're with that you don't have time to think about whether or not you're confident.

Win Your Day!

Contact MLB.com writer Steve Gilbert at [winyourday@gmail.com](mailto:winyourday@gmail.com) to sign up for his daily inspirational emails.



CRRayHead90