

# THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

THE COACHES' SOURCE FOR AMATEUR BASEBALL

www.baseballcollegian.com

Issue 9 - March 1, 2026



Ray Tanner Field at Founders Park at the University of South Carolina

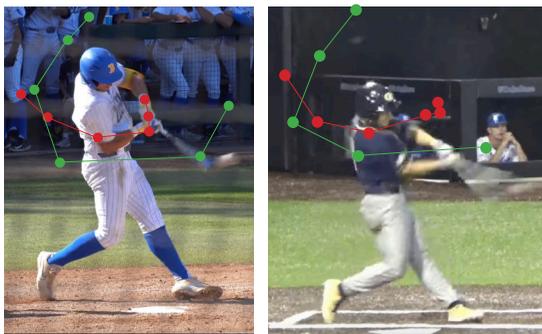
## The Swing Plane Mystery

By MARK WOODWORTH  
EDITOR/THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

Can we all agree on something? In the baseball swing, the hands and barrel go down *and* also go up. Simple, right?

Some hitters say they swing down, some say they swing up. In the world of hitting coaching, it's time we came to a consensus on the language.

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## 10 Days Down South

February is such a fascinating time for college baseball with all the hopes and dreams of a new season. News trickles in from around the country - some teams were playing on Jan. 30th! Division I started with much fanfare on Fri. Feb. 13, and the rest started in late February and early March.

*The Baseball Collegian* hit the road to watch some early games, but also to see how teams prepare to start their season. Over 10 days down south, we saw 17 teams from Florida to Georgia to South Carolina, as they all began their journey.

On the day before their season began, the **University of South Carolina** team was loose and joyous for the season ahead. Legendary coach Paul Mainieri (national champion winner at LSU) was beaming with excitement for the new season. His knowledge and experience in the game is something that can continually be learned from, and combined with hitting coach Monte Lee, (former head coach at Clemson), there is certainly exciting things ahead for the Gamecocks.

Down in Florida, while **Jacksonville** and **North Florida** were playing intrasquads, across town was a Div. II doubleheader between **Florida Memorial** and **Edward Waters University** at a secret great find: Henry L. Aaron Field. Located in a neighborhood, this former Negro Leagues stadium has a statue of Buck O'Neil, the first African-America coach in the Major Leagues. The stadium is



College of Charleston prepares for opening day.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

# Soul Throwers

## Real Life Scenarios

BY BROOKS HALL

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR/SOUL THROWERS

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You practice all off-season, then you're going to get to college, and you might throw your first bullpen before you get in the game.

"Holy crap, that thing I was working on with John back at the facility is not working." Guess what, you better find something that works in three pitches so you can get the guy out. Then you can reflect on it later that night.

But if you don't understand how to adjust, or think for yourself, or you're worrying about the feedback from your coach, it's going to be hard to be good at pitching, or playing any sport, or doing anything. It's very difficult.

Not everybody is talking about these real-life things. These are real-life scenarios that you need to understand, that is going to happen, and you better learn to adjust.

If your bullpen goes bad and you panic, honestly, you're not in the right head space. Whoever you're talking to or learning from is not giving you reality.



**Each month at *The Baseball Collegian*, we will highlight insights from Brooks Hall 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**

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## From the Publisher

On our travels down south to watch college baseball in February, a major question among players, coaches, parents and administrators is: Why does the season start so early?

For the southern schools, it's actually a fine time to play. For everyone else, baseball has become a winter sport, and is incredibly difficult (not to mention expensive). Everywhere you look, the southern teams are dominating the northern teams. The inequity in preparation time, on-field development, academic conflicts, and amount of home games vs. away games, is really difficult to defend.

Is it fun and exciting for the northern teams to get to travel to warm places? Yes. Does it get old always losing games that you might actually win later in the season? Yes.

Will moving back the start date at least two weeks be impactful? Yes. Can the money saved from not traveling as much more than compensate for the money schools would spend on allowing players to stay on campus longer after the semester ends? Yes.

Here's to some common-sense reform for the college baseball calendar to come soon.

*Mark A. Woodworth*

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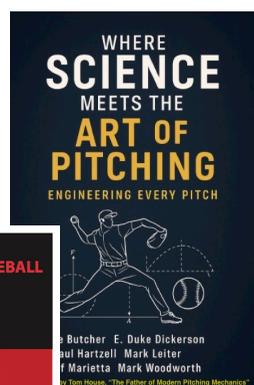
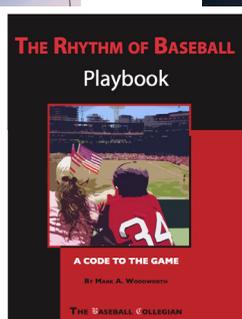
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The Coaches' Source for Amateur Baseball 2025 Special Issue

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MARCH 1, 2026 THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

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# NCAA BASEBALL REVENUE SHARING

The ground-breaking House settlement that was approved in June of 2025 transformed college athletics again (after NIL and the transfer portal). For this 2025-26 year, schools are allowed to pay athletics directly up to \$20.5 million each year.

Schools had the choice whether to participate in this revenue-sharing model. There were 310 schools that opted in, while 54 did not. By choosing to participate in the House settlement, schools are allowed to pay their athletes directly. For baseball, they are allowed to offer 34 full scholarships, but they have a roster limit of 34 as well, to be finalized by Dec. 1.

Players who were certified for competition in 2024-25 or promised a spot as incoming recruits for 2025-26, do not count against the 34-player limit and are protected as Designated Student-Athletes.

Mid-year transfers are not allowed, so the next opportunity for those cut or red-shirted is when the transfer portal opens from June 1-30, 2026.

Schools that do not opt-in do not have roster limits and are still restricted to 11.7 scholarships.

## Division I Schools that opted out of Revenue-Sharing

### Atlantic Sun

Bellarmino  
Central Arkansas  
Queens  
Stetson  
West Georgia

### America East

Binghamton  
UMBC

### Big Sky

Eastern Washington  
Idaho  
Idaho State  
Northern Arizona  
Portland State

### Big South

Charleston Southern  
Gardner-Webb  
Presbyterian  
UNC Asheville

### Big West

UC Irvine

### Ivy

Brown  
Columbia  
Cornell  
Dartmouth  
Harvard  
Penn  
Princeton  
Yale

### MAAC

Iona  
Manhattan  
Saint Peter's

### MEAC

NC Central

### Mountain West

Air Force

### Northeast

Central Conn. St.  
Chicago St.  
Fairleigh Dickinson  
LeMoyne  
Mercyhurst  
New Haven  
Stonehill  
Wagner

### Patriot League

American  
Army  
BU  
Bucknell  
Colgate  
Holy Cross  
Lafayette  
Lehigh  
Loyola  
Navy

### Ohio Valley

Tennessee St

### Southern

Citadel  
VMI

### Southland

Houston Christian  
Incarnate Word

### Summit

Omaha

Source: Sportico

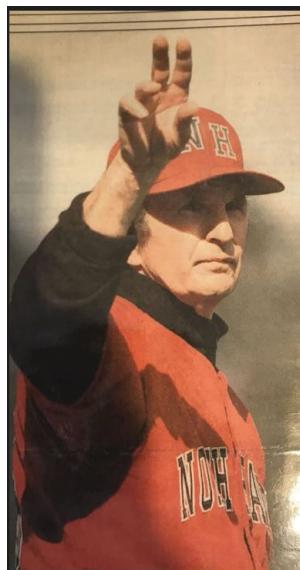
# “No Problem, I Got This” From a Legendary Coach

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:

Every spring, Bob brought together his pitching staff and his infield and laid out one of his key building blocks to winning: no inter-squad resentments:

From his memoir:

“Another part of my philosophy is that you never follow a walk with an error, and you never follow an error with a walk. I taught my players to stay supportive of one another, no matter what. Their job was to pick each other up, sustain each other, and not build up resentments when the game isn't going well.”



Courtesy of Bette DeMayo

The message he delivered was about FOCUS. He demanded complete focus every time we walked on the field, every practice, so that when things got tense in a game, we were prepared to perform under pressure. And what he was saying to his pitchers and infielders was that we had to bear down and double our efforts after a walk or an error, to prevent the big inning. It was not uncommon for a pitcher to turn back after an error and say, “No problem, I got this.”

Fact is, Coach was fortunate in '75 that his two main pitchers and his entire infield earned All-League honors. That is, there weren't many walks or errors!

## Chop Wood, Carry Water The Competitors Brain

BY LOREN FOXX

ASSISTANT EDITOR/THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

*Chop Wood, Carry Water* is a great book by Joshua Metcalf – really easy to read. It tells the story of John who's a young samurai warrior who goes to camp to learn how to become a samurai. But he's super disappointed because all he does at camp isn't what he expected. He's just chopping wood and carrying water. Every day before enlightenment: chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment: chop wood, carry water.

Eventually, he falls in love with the process. The process is chop wood, carry water. For him it becomes the process of becoming great. And to him, greatness is a bunch of small things added together, that most people think are too small to matter. Metcalf says, “Every now and then, a person comes along and accidentally gets it the first time. Most of us have to learn the hard way through

multiple failed experiments which allows us to learn lessons and skills that those who had it easier did not develop.

In the off-season, you have more time to chop wood and carry water. You can do all the little things that people think are too small to matter. You can do different things – You can lift heavy, you can do a throwing program, you can have a diet because you have more time. But you have to have a plan for it. You can also sleep more too, that's super important. You can do big things, physical fixes, surgeries, physical therapy. You can work on mental skills. You can work on recruiting – getting yourself out there to coaches and doing things that your opposition might not be doing to get yourself in front of coaches in places that you might want to play. Setting goals, deciding what your M.V.P. process is. In short, you have a chance in the offseason to decide who you want to become.

### Follow the Podcast!

*The Competitor's Brain*, a podcast hosted by Loren Foxx, takes years of experience in sports psychology, including working with greats in the business like Ken Ravizza, Brian Cain, and Dr. Rob Gilbert, and assembles the highlights into an easy-to-digest three minute daily podcast.

# College Baseball Hall of Fame

## Inducts Class of 2025

The 18th induction class of the College Baseball Hall of Fame was honored at the Night of Champions presented by Prairiefire on Feb. 12, 2026 in Overland Park, Kan., the home of the College Baseball Hall of Fame. The event took place on the eve of the start of the 2026 college baseball season.

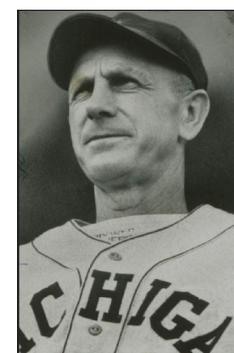
Eligibility for the ballot requires players to be out of college for 15 years and have played at least one year at an NCAA, NAIA or a junior college.

The Hall of Fame will have a physical home inside the Museum at PrairieFire in Overland Park, Kan., just 30 minutes from the Negro League Baseball Museum in downtown Kansas City. The new home is a result of a collaboration with Super Bowl champion and former Texas Tech baseball player Patrick Mahomes.

A fundraising campaign for the construction has been launched. All donations are tax deductible. Visit the College Baseball Foundation website to make a donation.



Hubie Brooks - Arizona State



Ray Fisher - Michigan coach

### 2025 Inductees

• Gene Ammann	P	Florida State	1968-70
• Kris Benson	P	Clemson	1994-96
• Kip Bouknight	P	South Carolina	1998-2001
• Hubie Brooks	SS	Mesa College/Arizona State	1976-78
• Gene Hooks	3B	Wake Forest	1947-50
• Mike Loynd	P	Florida State	1984-86
• Mark McGwire	1B/P	USC	1982-84
• Phil Nevin	3B	Cal State Fullerton	1990-92
• David Price	P	Vanderbilt	2005-07
• Earl Sanders	P/OF	Jackson State	1984-86
• Mike Stenhouse	OF	Harvard	1977-79
• Stephen Strasburg	P	San Diego State	2007-09
• Joe Thomas	P/1B	Marietta	1994-97
• Norm DeBriyn	Coach	Arkansas	1970-2002
• Clint Evans*	Coach	Cal-Berkeley	1930-54
• Ray Fisher*	Coach	Michigan	1921-59
• Les Murakami	Coach	Hawai'i	1968-97
• Ray Tanner	Coach	NC State/South Carolina	1988-2012
• Jerry Weinstein	Coach	Sacramento City College	1975-98
• Scott Boras	Agent	Pacific	1972-74
• Paul Guillie	Umpire	SEC Coordinator	1990-pres.

\* posthumously

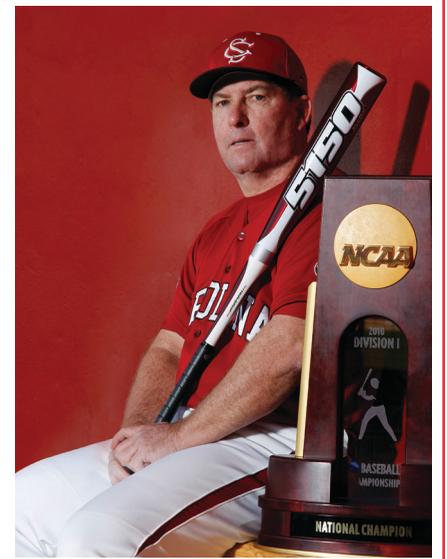
## South Carolina Coach Paul Mainieri on Ray Tanner's induction into the Hall of Fame:

"Ray is one of my favorite people in the world. We didn't know each other until we competed against each other. Our careers paralleled each other.

"I watched him from a distance, and I always respected him. And then when I became the coach at LSU and he had terrific teams here in Columbia, the competition was really great. It took LSU a while to catch up to South Carolina, but once we did, the games were great.

"I always had such respect for the South Carolina program because I knew how Ray conducted business. A very disciplined team, fundamentally-sound baseball. I like to think we did the same. So he and I hit it off.

"I'm so happy for him. Ray is the most humble, legendary person I know. He doesn't even like this stuff, like being awarded to Hall-of-Fames, and having fields named after him. I tell him he doesn't need to be so humble about it. You should enjoy it."



Also celebrated at the event will be last year's honorees:

**Brooks Wallace Award:** Roch Cholowsky, UCLA

**National Pitcher of the Year:** Jake Knapp, North Carolina

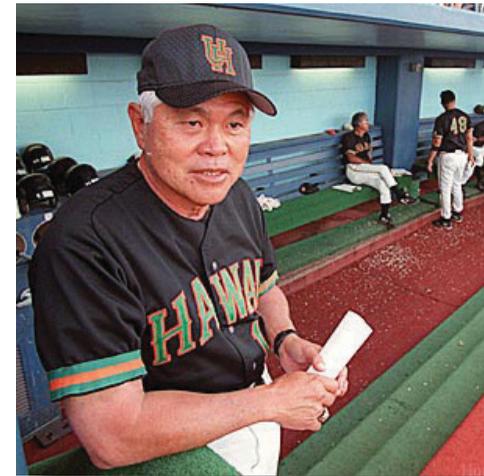
**John Olerud Two-Way Player of the Year:** Evan Dempsey, Florida Gulf Coast

**Skip Bertman Coach of the Year:** Brad Neffendorf, LSU Shreveport

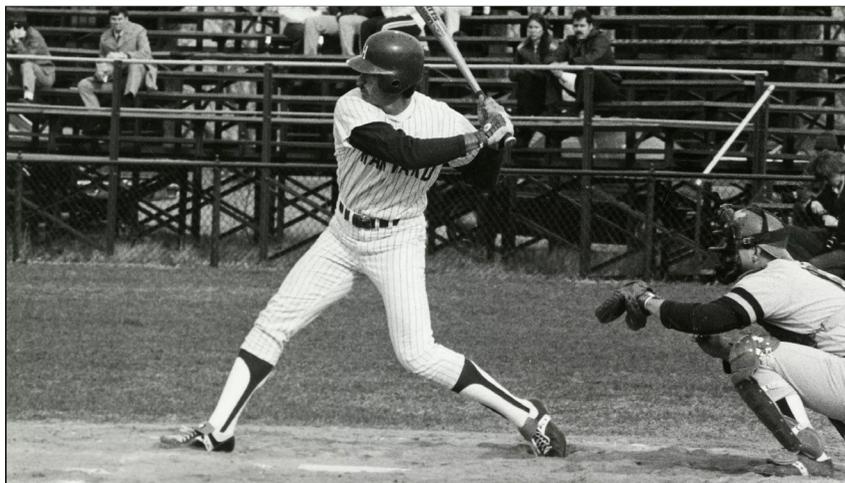
**Wayne Graham Award for Teaching Excellence:** Larry Lee, Cal Poly

**Dick Howser Trophy:** Alex Lodise, Florida State

**Buster Posey Award:** Caden Bodine, Coastal Carolina



Legendary University of Hawaii baseball coach  
Les Murakami



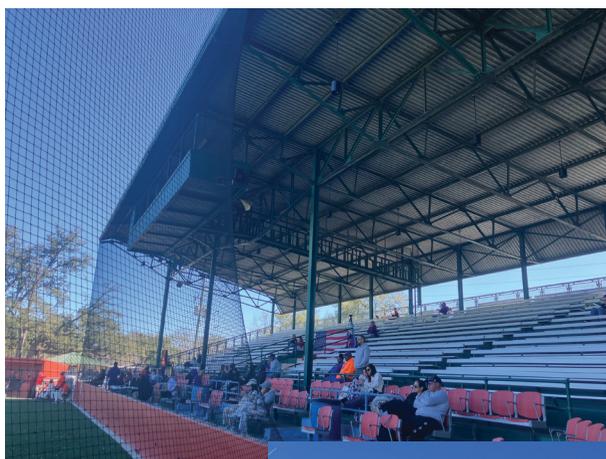
Mike Stenhouse - Harvard

# DISPATCHES Georgia/Florida/S.C.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

officially called J.B. Small Memorial Park, and has an old-fashioned covered grandstand and is a great place to watch a game.

Great fields are everywhere. Savannah's Grayson Park is the home of the **Savannah Bananas**, and while not an amateur team anymore, they are such an exciting opportunity not only for fans, but for former college players who truly love the game. Grayson Park exudes history with its brick walls and clean sightlines.



Henry L. Aaron Field at J.B. Small Memorial Park in Jacksonville, Fla. - home of Edward Waters University Baseball. Statue of legendary Negro Leagues player and manager Buck O'Neil.



Grayson Stadium, home of the Savannah Bananas in Savannah, Georgia.

Only an hour away is **Georgia Southern** with a gorgeous stadium and a blue monster scoreboard in right field. After visiting, you can see why all-time coach Jack Stallings stayed there so long to win over 850 games.



J.I. Clements Stadium at the Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Ga.

Three hours away across the plains of Georgia is Macon and the **Mercer University** campus. Their bright orange colors makes all their fields glow, and their cozy baseball stadium is a beauty and right on campus.

Atlanta is a different level of bustle than Macon, as tucked into the middle of the big city is **Georgia Tech**. Their baseball field

receives top billing with their field in the center of it all between classroom buildings and fraternity row and the skyline of Atlanta beyond the outfield fence. It's fun to watch batting practice with the exit velocities on the big scoreboard, especially when a ton of guys were hitting them into the trees in right at 105+ and 425+.



Harmon Stadium at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville, Fla.



Ray Tanner Field at Founders Park at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, S.C.



John Sessions Stadium at Jacksonville University with a view of the water from the top row.





OrthoGeorgia Park at Claude Smith Stadium at Mercer University in Macon, Ga.



Chappell Park at Emory University in Atlanta, Ga.

Across town, Div. III **Emory** had their own opening day against **Huntingdon** (Ala.). Their field is an excellent place to watch a game, be it up close or on the hill down the left-field line.

Athens, Georgia has to be one of the best college towns in America, with clubs and restaurants right across the street from the campus of the **University of Georgia**. Foley Field has seen some legendary baseball, and the fraternity houses on the hill in right afford a unique place to watch a game.



Foley Field at the University of Georgia in Athens, Ga.



Mac Nease Baseball Park at Russ Chandler Stadium at Georgia Tech in Atlanta, Ga.

Down on the coast, **Charleston Southern** (located on the northern outskirts of Charleston) is a small school, but has a real good vibe to watch a game. Opening day featured **Bucknell** and you could tell both teams were thrilled to be actually playing games.

In downtown Charleston, **The Citadel** gets to play at Joseph Riley Park – “The Joe” – on the waterfront. Also the home of the Charleston Riverdogs, the Yankees Single-A team, the stadium is first-class pro-level all the way and was a great place to watch February baseball under the lights against **Liberty**. It’s also the home of the Roland Hemond Professional Baseball Scouts Hall of Fame.



College of Charleston Baseball Stadium at Patriots Point in Mt. Pleasant, S.C.



Joseph P. Riley Jr. Park - home of The Citadel baseball in Charleston, S.C.



Neilson Field @ SCU Ballpark at Charleston Southern University in Charleston, S.C.

All good trips come to end, and the **College of Charleston** is a great place to finish. While their campus is downtown, across the huge bridge into Mt. Pleasant is a beautiful complex. The baseball field is right next to the softball field, so there was tons of action and energy as the College of Charleston hosted **Rutgers** for opening weekend. A great place to watch a game.

# The Swing Plane Mystery

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The problem in coaching swing plane is about being clear *when* the hands and barrel go down, and when they go up.

A breakdown of two of the top college hitters in the nation, Roch Cholowsky from UCLA and Drew Burress from Georgia Tech, are the models we can use.

It is clear that from the initial stance, the hands and barrel go down.

But notice that while the barrel is going down and back, the hands are going down and forward. That is because the hands are leading the way and pulling the trailing barrel behind it.

At some point, the barrel and hands bottom out. Cholowsky's barrel bottoms out behind his back (right) hip, while Burress bottoms out at his back (right) hip.

From there, the barrel *and* hands of both hitters go slightly up. In MLB in 2025, MLB hitters swung an average of 8.59 degrees up at contact. The range was from an average of 18 degrees up (Cal Raleigh, Max Muncy, Zach Neto) to an average of 1 degree up (Vladimir Guerrero, Jr.).

Here are some other hitters and how much they swing up:

- Shohei Ohtani (15 degrees)
- Jose Altuve (15 degrees)
- Aaron Judge (14 degrees)
- Freddie Freeman (11 degrees)
- Christian Yelich (10 degrees)
- Mookie Betts (9 degrees)
- Mike Trout (8 degrees)
- Louis Arraez (6 degrees)
- Bobby Witt, Jr. (5 degrees)
- Steven Kwan (3 degrees)



UCLA Shortstop Roch Cholowsky

● = Hands  
● = Barrel

Let's talk about the angle of the bat in the hitting zone. Blast Baseball's sensor and app uses the term "attack angle." That is, the angle of the barrel, relative to the ground, at contact.

It is clear from the data, that hitters are swinging slight up at contact. Not much (an average of 1 to 18 degrees). This makes all kinds of sense: matching the plane of the pitch allows hitters to be a little late or a little early and still have the barrel make solid contact.

Here are the average angle a pitch drops as it crosses home plate.

**Vertical Attack Angle**  
(Downward angle of pitches)

FB	-4.89
Sinker	-5.79
Slider	-6.79
Changeup	-7.01
Split	-7.12
Curveball	-8.28
Eephus	-14.2

All Pitches -6.21

Source: Matt Chamberlain  
505,265 pitches from 2025 season of MLB

The average angle that a MLB pitch cross the plate is -6.21, meaning they are going down. Obviously, fastballs are “flatter” and go down the least, while curveballs go down the most. The Eephus pitch is included because that is mostly position players pitching at a lower velocity, which is applicable to amateur baseball in that slower pitches need more arc, and thus, explains younger kids are able to match the swing plane with more of an uppercut.

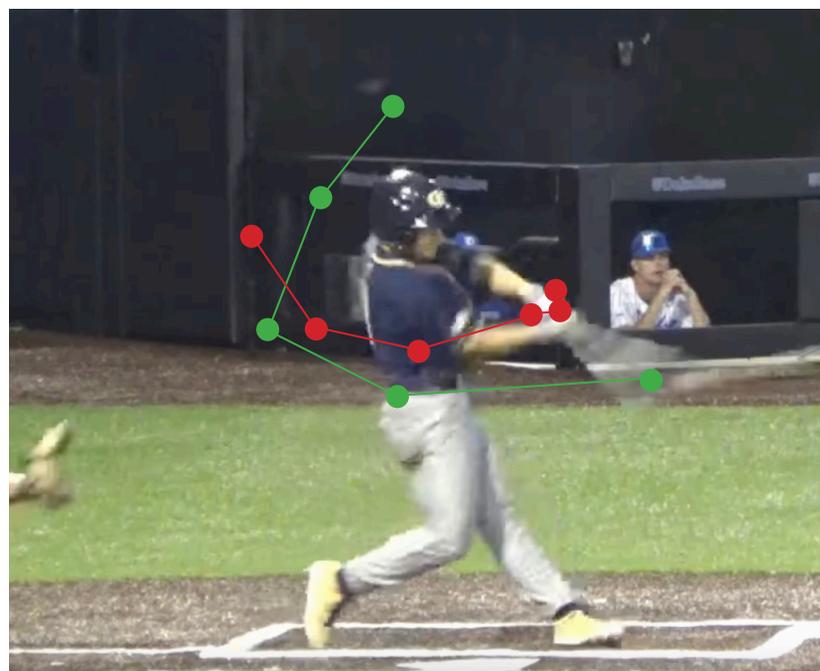
So, we have the pitch coming down, and the optimal way to make contact is to swing slightly up. Yet, we still have though the concept of swinging down.

The idea of swinging down seems to come from a couple of things:

**1) When someone hits a pop-up, the common coaching refrain is to “swing down.”**

This is so patently wrong. Swinging down means you’ll have a greater chance of hitting the bottom of the ball, and thus, pop-it-up.

Ted Williams, the greatest advocate for swinging up, is famous for saying that he hit too many ground balls. Another way to think of it is from tennis: when you swing down (slice it), the ball goes up. When you swing up (topspin), the ball goes down.



**Georgia Tech Outfielder Drew Burress**

**2) Some hitters primary feeling when swinging is the first part: the down part.**

A lot of hitters notice the first part - swinging down to the ball. What they don’t notice is the second part - the upswing. By starting down and forward with their hands, it allows them to be direct and compact, as opposed to dropping their hands straight down and then coming forward. Go down *and* forward as the swing begins is much preferable than go simply down, then forward, as it is a quicker distance between two points.

When hitters pop-up, they are often told they “dropped their hands.” That has really become shorthand for dropping *before* going forward.

Back to the language. It is so confusing for hitters, particularly young hitters, maybe is it possible to create a clear common language:

**Swing Plane:** The angle after the barrel and hands bottom out (a synonym for “attack angle.”) This is the second part of the swing.

**Direct to the ball:** The first movement of the hands that delivers the barrel to the swing plane. This teaches that the hitter doesn’t drop the hands down and then go forward. The hitter drops the hands *while* going forward.

**Direct to the ball, then swing up:** This makes it clear that there are two distinct parts of the swing: Down & forward to start, then after bottoming out, slightly up.

# The Wisdom of Skip Bertman

## Chapter 3 – Overcoming Failure

Bertman has enjoyed great success on an international level, having served as the head coach of the 1996 United States Olympic Bronze Medal Team and as an assistant coach on the 1988 USA Gold Medal Squad. Skip Bertman led the Tigers to the College World Series four times before finally winning a national championship. And often, his team became champions after suffering big losses. That's because Coach Bertman knows how to get his team to overcome failure.



### AFRAID TO FAIL

People won't get fired up, won't set high goals and won't try new things because they're afraid they are going to fail. And truly, the number one obstacle to success in adult life is fear of failure. But everybody fails. Learning to be resilient, persistent, relentless is what the players must learn because failure is a part of winning. Excellent seekers see failure as a temporary setback and part of the natural laws of life.

### QUESTIONS PLAYERS SHOULD ASK THEMSELVES

After all, everybody fails. But when my player fails, I ask him to ask himself the two most important questions:

1. What did I do right that got me this far?
2. What could I have done differently to make the situation come out a little better?

No negatives, no beating yourself up - just learning and growing and moving on.

### JOHN WOODEN

Legendary basketball coach John Wooden introduced the "fast break" to college basketball. In that year, they set a record for turnovers at UCLA. But, of course, they stayed with it, perfected it, and the rest is history.

### SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Sports Illustrated did not make any money for 11 straight years, but they stayed with it. And that, too, is history. You can't give up and you can't give in. You have to be relentless.

### SUPER BOWL COACHES (NOLL, LANDRY, WALSH)

Chuck Noll, Tom Landry and Bill Walsh - three of the greatest NFL football coaches - counted for 9 of 16 Super Bowl victories from the years 1974 to 1989. These three coaches also have another record in common. They all have the worst record for a first-year coach in NFL history. But they stayed with it. They were resilient, they were relentless, they were persistent.

You can never give up. You can never give in. People remember you for your successes, not for your failures. Ty Cobb is a great example of how we remember people for their successes and not for their failures.

### TY COBB - RISK AND BEING REMEMBERED FOR SUCCESS

For many years, Ty Cobb was considered the greatest base stealer of all time with 96 stolen bases. But he was safe only 70% of the time. That means he was thrown out - that is, he failed — nearly one-third of the time. But we don't remember that.

### MAX CAREY

The Major League record for baseball's highest percentage of stolen bases (51-of-53) is held by Max Carey of the 1922 Pittsburgh Pirates. That's 96%, but nobody remembers that because he didn't risk enough.

### RICKEY HENDERSON

When Rickey Henderson finally set a new stolen base record, he was thrown out 42 times. That, too, is a Major League record. So you see that risk is not just important - it's essential. It must happen for you to be successful.

## THOMAS EDISON

The most prolific failure of all time was Thomas Edison. As everyone knows, he tried thousands of times to perfect the electric light bulb and a storage battery. This guy was relentless, he was persistent, he was really resilient. So much so that by 1930, fully one-sixth of the people in America used a product that was marketed, distributed and produced by this so-called failure who obviously saw every failure as a learning experience of how not to do it. Failure. It's part of winning.

Remember, risk isn't just an option. It's imperative. You might want to teach your players, as I do, that they will fail. We all fail and we simply need to use it to get better. The more familiar players are with failure, the more easily they can rise above it.

## THE POSTER BOARD

I use a couple of techniques that have been successful for me. One is placing newspaper articles of tragic circumstances on a 36" poster board - often failures of one kind or another that have actually happened recently. Then I usually put the poster board at the end of the dugout near the back rack for the players to see. When a player strikes out, throws a home run pitch or makes an error and is really down, I give him a few moments to compose himself. Then I refer him to the poster as a reminder of what can really go wrong in the world and how he can rise above tragedy in life as well as on the baseball field. My players practice telling themselves, "I'm better than that; I can overcome this." Then they pick themselves up and get back in the ball game.

## MARK TWAIN - GET COMFORTABLE WITH FAILURE

Players have to learn to be comfortable with failure. After all, it's part of the game. Mark Twain once said, "The ability to forget is often more important than the ability to remember." And that is very true if you just delivered a pitch that was hit for a homer or you struck out and left a couple of runners on base. Our players have to develop mental muscles that allow them to be flexible enough to make a mistake and then say to themselves, "I'm better than that. Next time, I'll do better."

## FLUSH IT — TOILET BANK AND KEY CHAIN

A great technique to get back into the moment, to shake it off, is literally to flush it. That technique was given to me by Dr. Ken Ravizza, who worked with us on the USA Olympic team in 1996. He was a sports psychologist with the California Angels and a professor at Cal State Fullerton. In the back of our dugout sits a bank in the shape of a toilet with a battery in it that allows it to flush, where a player can literally flush away his mistakes. This symbol is so successful that I've gotten each player a key chain with a smaller version that he can take with him. And whether on or off the field, he can flush away his mistakes.

You want to help your own team do the same. Recognize, first, that you can't succeed without risk. But risk brings failures, so help your players get comfortable with failure. Use those unavoidable failures to overcome, learn and seek excellence. And the vital thing is that failure really is part of success. Be relentless.

## CHRIS DEMOUY TESTIMONIAL

"I can remember our game against Tennessee where I was pitching and the score was tied. The lead-off guy came up and hit a home run, and they went ahead by one run. I still had three more outs to go and coach left me out there, and that gave me confidence. What he says is, 'You've got to flush it and move on to the next pitch and the next out.' And that's what I did. He also said, 'All you can do is all you can do, and all you can do is enough.' When you're out on the mound, you learn from that, and he gives you the confidence to go out there and get the next out. And that's what I did. I got the next three outs, and my teammates picked me up. And we eventually ended up winning the game."

### Skip's Corner

*The Baseball Collegian* is proud to present the wisdom of coaching legend Skip Bertman for coaches and players to help take their game to the same championship level as he did in his coaching career at LSU and Miami.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

- Two key questions players should ask themselves:
  1. What did I do right that got me this far?
  2. What could I have done differently to make the situation come out a little better?
- Failure is an unavoidable and necessary part of success.
- People remember you for your successes, not your failures.
- The more familiar players are with failure, the more easily they can rise above it.
- You must be able to flush it and get to the next pitch.





**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 judg-

ment, 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 which side of the rubber to throw off of. This month, the discussion turns to whether or not you push off with the back leg.

### Q. Do you push off with the back leg?

#### General Belief:

##### • Yes Steven Ellis

Well, if you look at closely at enough videotape of power-pitchers (guys that throw 95mph+), you'll see that the back leg actually does straighten. It doesn't straighten out completely but it does straighten some, and that's all it takes to push. ([thecompletepitcher.com](http://thecompletepitcher.com))

##### • Yes Dr. Mike Marshall

Sir Isaac Newton's Law of Reaction says that for every action force, there is an equal and oppositely-directed reaction force. This means that if baseball pitchers want to apply greater force to their pitches toward home plate, then they have to apply greater force toward the opposite direction, or, toward second base. To apply greater force toward second base with the pitching leg, I teach my pitchers to point their pitching foot at home plate. As a result, my pitchers use the muscles that plantar flex their pitching ankle, extend their pitching knee and extend their hip joint to powerfully push straight forward off the pitching rubber.

Therefore: I recommend that, to apply greater force toward second base, pitchers point their pitching foot at home plate and 'sprint start' their pitching leg off the pitching rubber. ([drmikemarshall.com](http://drmikemarshall.com))





### Other Philosophies:

- **No Bill Thurston**

As the stride leg lowers, the lead foot should move downward (not swung out!) and slide just above the mound surface.

- The body should just glide forward.
- The pitcher should not push off until the stride foot has landed, stabilizing the body.
- Technically, it is a pulling action of the hip flexors and a pull of the back knee forward and inward rather than a push-off from the rubber. (*The Fine Art of Pitching*, by Bill Thurston)

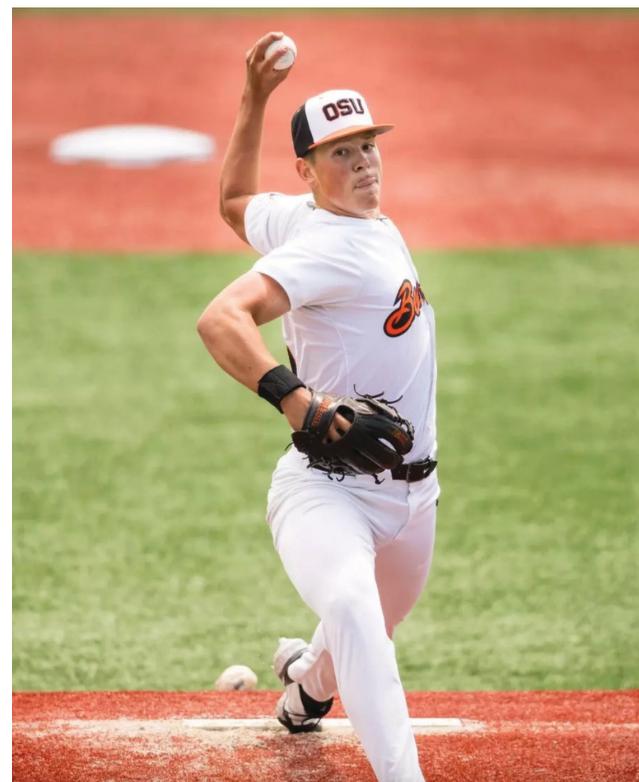
- **No Tom House**

You can't push down a hill. All elite pitchers find a posture and keep a posture by stabilizing with their post leg.

(*The Picture Perfect Pitcher*, by Tom House)

- **No Brad Mills**

I will tell you a big secret right now that 95 percent of coaches and pitching instructors do not know. The pitcher's legs or his back foot does not move him from his back leg to his front leg. Neither does swinging the front leg out. The pitcher must move his center of gravity. His pelvis. His belly button. It is his back hip that does the moving. His back leg or foot can't move him 1 inch. His leg is simply used as a support mechanism or something to move the pelvis or his lower body away from. (pitching.com)



# LEARN THE GAME

Presented by 6-Tool

## The Problem with Tagging

By MARK WOODWORTH  
EDITOR/THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

Games are decided on this!

Tagging is such an impactful aspect of winning ball games, yet gets such an inordinately small amount of attention by players and coaches.

It seems simple, yet, good tagging technique requires proper mechanics combined with focused, attentive practice.

Let's start with the mission:

### 1) Catch the ball

You can't tag the runner if you don't have the ball.

### 2) Tag the runner before he touches the base.

This requires efficiency of movement by the body and glove.

Here is the essential technique:

### 1) Catch the ball

This is seemingly obvious, but it is clearly not. If a player fielded a ground ball by turning their body sidewise, not moving their feet, then doing the ole' move where they just jab at the ball with the glove with complete indifference as to whether they catch it, would anyone agree that is correct?

Yet, this happens all the time with tags, and no one gets annoyed.

Just because the fielder is receiving a thrown ball doesn't mean he doesn't perform standard infielder technique. Square up, jab step forward and positive action on short hops, jab step back on long hops. Jump or reach for errant throws. The only difference from fielding a ground ball is

that *after* the ball is caught, the fielder swipes the tag. This requires a jump turn to the left – if the ball is in the air at the base, the jump turn can happen before the ball is caught. If the ball is on the ground, then catch it first, then tag with maybe a jump turn jab step.

Oh, and two hands doesn't hurt either.

### 2) Set up in front of the bag

This happens too often at all levels, though less and less the higher you go. Players need to set up on the side of the bag closest to the thrower. At second on a steal, this means just towards the pitching mound. So many players stand behind the bag, and this makes the throw longer, meaning you have to reach forward to tag, or often, the ball hits the runner before even getting to the fielder.

### 3) Let the ball come to you

If the throw makes it in the air and doesn't require short-hop positive action, then the fielder should not reach out for the ball and then swipe back to tag. The ball travels faster than a player can swipe, so let the ball travel, then bring the glove straight down to the base to tag.

### 4) Tag the corner of the base

Often, players reach for the runner's body. This habit has led to an incredible amount of safe calls, and to umpires being confused. The fielder must immediately and directly tag the corner of the base - after all, isn't that where the runner has to go? The urge to tag the body must be resisted.

Also, tagging with two hands can be effective to make sure the ball stays in the glove. Players should tag with the back of the glove, so as not to have their throwing hand get cleated.

**6-Tool** 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

**Know your role in every situation**

The advertisement features a smartphone displaying a quiz interface with a baseball field video and multiple-choice questions. A large image of a baseball player in a New York Yankees uniform is shown in a dynamic pose, with a baseball in the air. The background is a dark blue gradient with white geometric shapes.



Good: Set up in front of base  
 Good: Tag with two hands  
 Good: Swipe the tag  
 Bad: Tagging the body instead of closer to the base  
**OUT!**



Good: Let the ball travel – not reaching out  
 Bad: Setting up and receiving behind the bag.  
**SAFE!**



Good: Setting up in front of the base  
 Good: Tagging with two hands  
 Good: Holding the tag to make sure he's out  
 Good: Tagging the runner low - he's out so early, he correctly did not tag the corner of the base.  
**OUT!**



Good: Setting up in front of the base  
 Good: Tagging the back corner of the base  
 Good: Holding the tag to make sure he's out  
 Good: Showing the umpire the ball.  
**OUT!**



Good: Setting up in front of the base  
 Good: Catching and tagging with two hands  
 Good: Tagging the corner of the base  
**OUT!**



Good: Setting up in front of the plate  
 Good: Catching and tagging with two hands  
 Good: Once you have the ball, you can block the plate  
**OUT!**

# Coach Cronin and Ted Williams

BY PAT CRONIN

AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK, *"INSIDE" BASEBALL IN THE TIME OF COVID*

In weekly messages to his “sheltered” high school players, a coach posts pandemic coping strategies, the secrets of playing winning baseball, and his original stories.

## Introduction To A Pitching Philosophy

You may find it surprising that much of the pitching philosophy – and that of winning baseball in general – I developed from my work with Ted Williams at his baseball camp down in Lakeville, MA, back in the mid-'80s.

Ted believed hitting a baseball successfully in the course of a season was the most difficult thing to do in all of sports. As the last man to hit .400, I think he was qualified to make that statement.

He was a great man to be around, to talk to, and to learn from. Whenever I hear the word “charisma,” Ted is the guy I think about. He was the man the late, great actor John Wayne (way before your time but an actor who always played the cool, brave, tough guy) WANTED to be.

Ted believed many things about hitting, all of them explained clearly in his book, *The Science of Hitting*. If you want to become a great hitter, read that book and memorize the key passages, especially the ones about his rules for hitting and how unprepared he believed a lot of pitchers were.

His rules for a hitter's first at bat each game included the following:

1. Take the first pitch (so you can see what the guy has that day, his speed, his delivery, etc.)
2. Then don't hit anything you have not seen before (which means if the pitcher throws you a fastball on the first pitch, do not swing if the next pitch is a curve, a change, a knuckleball, etc. His belief here was that the chances of you hitting anything you have not seen at least once

are very poor).

3. The same thing applies on the third pitch unless you have 2 strikes by then, which rarely happens unless your team is playing Whitman-Hanson! (Our kids are taught to throw 2 strikes in a row...in fact... all strikes in a row... and this is why!)

Ted also had this overriding rule for everyone: GET A GOOD PITCH TO HIT ! (No explanation needed here! Don't swing at balls outside the strike zone and you will immediately become a better hitter!)

Ted knew that any time he hit the ball hard, it would have at least a chance to get out of the park for a homer if he elevated it. So, of course, he wanted to swing slightly up.

And a second overriding rule Ted employed: Lift the ball (swing up...today they think they invented “launch angle?!”)

I have news for you... “The Greatest Hitter That Ever Lived” said this decades ago. As a young coach, I went into the library and looked up Ted's stats to see what he was talking about. I knew he had hit 521 career homers... despite the fact that he missed some important years because he devoted a few to fighting for his country as a pilot!

I learned that Ted also had hit a combination of 521 career doubles and triples too. Think about how many total bases that number of doubles and triples makes up! It resulted in more damage by balls that got over the infielders' heads and into the outfield. PLUS, Ted knew that any time he hit the ball hard, it would have at least

a chance to get out of the park for a homer if he elevated it. So, of course, he wanted to swing slightly up.

I actually went out with Ted to the mound on Diamond 2 at Ted's camp one day after he had sat with me during one of our games. I had his book with me, which he signed. We drove a 2x4 into the ground at the pitcher's landing spot at the front of the mound. Then we ran a wire to the strike zone of an imaginary hitter at the plate. There it was, as clear as day, the downward angle of a pitch. Ted said in order to lift the baseball – AND to keep the bat in the strike zone longer – the batter should try to swing slightly up

The man was a hitting genius. Ironically, the keys to successful pitching I will post this afternoon came about as I thought about how to beat Ted Williams. Ponder that. I wanted to go against everything he was trying to do. And, I wanted the defense to do the same. Later this afternoon, I will post some pitching notes I wrote after I had studied Ted's hitting theories. Stay well.

## Bill Madlock

One summer day in the mid-80s, I was responsible for coaching at the batting cage at the Ted Williams Baseball Camp in Lakeville, MA.

Bill Madlock comes over to me and introduces himself. The word had gone around camp that he was going to be there, but I was still surprised to see him in the flesh. Here was a four-time National League Batting Champion, a National League All Star, and a World Series winner.

He was playing with the Dodgers at the time, I believe, and they were out east playing in a series against the Mets. He had taken the opportunity to come up and visit his young son, who may have been 10 or 11.

Bill “Mad Dog” Madlock was the real deal, an amazing hitter, as you can imagine. He was also a very nice guy, someone who did not mind taking the time to talk a little baseball with me.

We got around to talking about hitting, of course, and I asked him if, like Ted Williams, he guessed when he was at bat. He said absolutely, everyone guessed. Some more than others. He said that unlike Ted and a lot of the other big leaguers, he usually guessed pitch location, not the pitch itself. He said pitch location dictated pitch in most cases. A pitch inside, for instance, was usually a fastball. If he had 2 strikes on him, he might look outside, which, in that case, was usually some kind of breaking ball.

I started to think about that and realized it was a pretty good approach for high school batters. I particularly liked the notion that kids with 2 strikes would not get caught by as many pitches if they guessed away. Why? Because no matter what the pitch was, they would have a better chance of hitting it if they were already looking out there.

On the other hand, if they were guessing just curve and not location, they would have no chance on a fastball thrown on the outside corner because now they had to deal quickly with 2 surprises: first, it was a much faster pitch, and secondly, it was away from them and more difficult to reach because they were not prepared to go out there.

Of course, guessing according to location requires a hitter to be able to hit the ball to different parts of the field. If you guess away, then you have to be able to drive that pitch away. If, on the other hand, you are looking on the inside of the plate, you must be able to get your hands inside the ball and pull it.

This is a huge problem for many high school kids because so many of them grow up becoming pull hitters.

But I like hitters who guess location. Give it a try. Start taking time during batting practice in the cage and on the field – once we get back – working the ball to both sides of the field.

Also do this in soft-toss. Have the ball tossed to certain parts of the plate as you work with a partner. You will be surprised how much better a hitter you will become.

I asked him if, like Ted Williams, he guessed when he was at bat. He said absolutely, everyone guessed.

The best hitters I have seen in my coaching career have been the ones who do this. They practice driving the ball to all fields and then do it in games.

And whether they guess pitch or location, or decide to eliminate swinging at one kind pitch or another, all great hitters, I believe, have a plan, an approach in mind, before they go up to the plate.

#### **Eddie Waitkus**

I mentioned Eddie Waitkus in my last article. I met him at the Whitman Legion Post when I played. He was working at Ted’s camp in Lakeville and came up to Whitman with an American Legion member for a visit.

The movie *The Natural* was, at least in part, based on his life. He was also a member of what

is known as “The Whiz Kids,” the 1950 Philadelphia Phillies, the team that won the National League pennant that year with mostly rookies.

The first thing I remember about Eddie Waitkus is that he was a gentleman. Here was a big leaguer who had played baseball at the highest level, and he was a kind, gentle, and humble guy who loved baseball and young people.

I also remember the tip he gave me, and it is related to the hitting and pitching points here.

He asked me to get into my batting stance. Then he walked over to me, turned my chin so that it faced the pitcher and also made my eyes level to the ground. He said everything else was good. ( I told you he was kind.)

He knew, as did Ted and all MLB hitters, that tracking a pitched ball was hard to do, especially if it was being thrown to you at speeds over 90 MPH. He told me in order to give yourself the best chance of hitting it, you must make sure both eyes saw the ball at the same time AND both were level, parallel to the ground. This second point is worth commenting on. I see a lot of hitters who cock their heads on an angle a bit. Pick a point on a wall, get into your stance, cock your head as some hitters do, and look at the spot.

Then put your chin over your front shoulder, make sure your eyes are parallel to the ground, and look again. There is no question you will see a pitched baseball better with two eyes, both even.

When MLB starts up, watch each hitter for this.

**Coach Pat Cronin coached East Bridgewater (Mass.) High School for 34 years, winning 421 games and numerous league and sectional titles. He then coached at Whitman-Hanson (Mass.) High school for five seasons, finishing with 73 more wins and two league championships. A beloved and well-respected coach, he has been inducted into the East Bridgewater, Whitman-Hanson, and Massachusetts Baseball Coaches Association Hall of Fames.**

# Baseball as a Road to God

## The Clubhouse

By JOHN SEXTON

WITH THOMAS OLIPHANT AND PETER J. SCHWARTZ

AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK, *BASEBALL AS A ROAD TO GOD*

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No one has described the profound dimensions of baseball better, or with more eloquence and insight, than the late Bart Giamatti – Renaissance man, scholar, university president (at Yale) devoted family man (his son is the actor Paul Giamatti), and final commissioner of baseball, the one time we’ve had a commissioner who loved the game more than the business, who emphasized stewardship rather than ownership. After his premature death in 1989 at age fifty-one, friends put together a collection of his baseball writings, and speeches and called it *A Great and Glorious Game*.

It is a great glorious volume, beginning with a keen observation about baseball’s almost casually cruel arithmetic: “It breaks your heart. It is designed to break your heart. The game begins in the spring, when everything else begins again, and it blossoms in the summer, filling the afternoons and evenings, and then as soon as the chill rains come, it stops and leaves you to face the fall alone.” Giamatti wrote that it “keeps time fat and slow and lazy.” As he noted correctly, “In 1839, the rule became fixed that one runs [the bases] counterclockwise. Time does not matter in baseball.”

Giamatti was writing after his beloved Red Sox had just missed in another pennant race, but his wistful words mask an abiding hope for the next spring, and the profound optimism it will bring. “I was counting on the game’s deep patterns, three strikes, three outs, three times three innings, and its deepest impulse, to go out and back, to leave and to return home, to set the order of the day and to organize the daylight.” A continual theme in Giamatti’s prose concerns the importance

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.

of the concept of home in baseball, especially in a nation as peripatetically bustling as America. He summed up his inspiring worldview in an essay about the Sox-Yankees playoff game in 1978, which featured a wonderful analogy. Each batter, for him is Odysseus.

Baseball is about homecoming. It is a journey by theft and strength, guile and speed, out around first to the far island of second, where foes lurk in the reefs and the green sea suddenly grows deeper, then to turn sharply, skimming the shallows, making for a shore that will show a friendly face, a color, a familiar language and, at third, to proceed, no longer by paths indirect, but straight, to home.

Baseball is about going home, and how hard it is to get there and how driven is our need. It tells us how good home is. Its wisdom says you can go home again but that you cannot stay. The journey must always start once more, the bat an oar over the shoulder, until there is an end to all journeying. *Nostos*; the going home; the game of nostalgia, so apt an image for our hunger that it hurts.

Giamatti’s writings about baseball fit in a long line of writing about the elevating capacity of the game that can be traced back at least to Walt Whitman. In 1846, as the rules of baseball and the nation’s love for it still were evolving, the great poet’s observations were recorded at least twice:

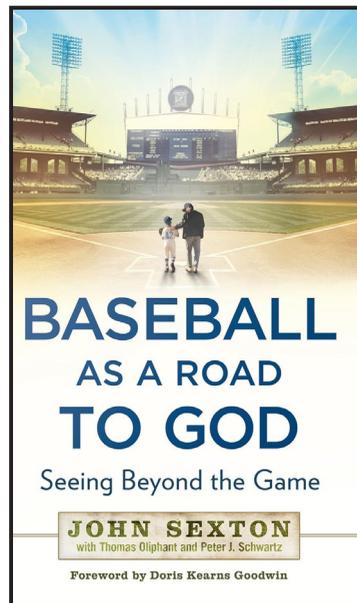
“In our sundown perambulations of late through the other parts of Brooklyn, we have observed several parties of youngsters playing ‘base,’ a certain game of ball... The game of ball is glorious... I see great things in baseball. It is our game, the American game. Baseball will take people out of doors, fill them with oxygen, give them a larger physical stoicism, tend to relieve us from being a nervous, dyspeptic set, repair those losses and be a blessing to us.”

From a different perspective, I have tried to show how many of the elements we find in baseball – faith, doubt, conversion, accursedness, blessings – are elements associated with the religious experience; that inside the game the formative material of spirituality can be found.

In short, viewed through a certain lens, baseball evokes the essence of religion. If we open ourselves to the rhythms and intricacies of the game, if we sharpen our noticing capacity, if we allow the timelessness and intensity of the game’s most magnificent moments to shine through, the resulting heightened sensitivity might give us a sense of the ineffable, the transcendent.

Baseball is defined by wonder and amazement: Johnny Podres’s proud ironworker father from upstate New York, ducking out of the Brooklyn Dodgers’ clubhouse celebration after Game Seven in 1955, crying alone in the players’ parking lot after his son’s astonishing game against the Yankees. This wonder and amazement, this touching of the beyond, is not the domain of the unknown that will someday be known but the domain of the unknowable, of faith.

But in baseball as in religion, deep faith cannot exist unless there is doubt, its handmaiden; confronting doubt is a central challenge in both religion and life, from the earliest Christian theologians to the 1991 Braves and Twins. This journey takes many roads, but conversion is certainly one of them, and the last steps can be truly miraculous as well as inexplicable. But there is a fine line between agony and ecstasy. Had Willie



Mays dropped that fly ball in 1954, Giants fans may well have considered themselves accursed rather than blessed. It helps as well when our heroes are good people and not simply accomplished. Without sinners, our saints, would be unremarkable. For each Christy Mathewson, there is often a Ty Cobb. We also want to try to keep them alive, to revisit their stories, both to learn from them and to try to relive their magic. It is no disrespectful sacrilege to observe that Jews gather for Passover Seders each year to re-create the miraculous story of their release from slavery in Egypt and that Pirates fans gather every October to experience Bill Mazeroski’s home run again. And as in religion, some of the most meaningful experiences in baseball are not lived alone but are shared with communities – from a family to a team to a country – that unite us in concentric circles of relationship.

My NYU course and this book are attempts at exploring the basic building blocks of a spiritual or religious life, finding them, perhaps surprisingly to some, in an institution associated with secular life. The nine innings of this book are an assertion – an affirmation – that there is a meaningful dimension of the human experience (whether seen in what we recognize formally as religions or in a secular pursuit called baseball that cannot be captured in words. Francis Bacon once observed, “The best part of beauty is that which a picture cannot express.” This dimension, which coexists with the dimension of the known, the knowable, and the wonder of science, affirms some of the most important truths of our humanity, like the joy of love or the significance of our lives. This reflection won’t persuade those who are not at some level already aware of it. As Louis Armstrong once said of jazz: “If you have to ask what it is, you’ll never know.”

In our times, it is fashionable to force a choice between the worlds of science and religion, of the mind and the soul. Either/or. This, in my view, is a false dichotomy – and perhaps this collection of baseball stories analyzed through a lens (and an intellectual tradition) usually reserved for the study of what are obviously religious experiences can cause some to see why. I embrace enthusiastically the joys of the intellectual life; but I reject the notion that, as a consequence, I must forfeit the wonders of a deeply transformative religious life.

Baseball calls us to live slow and notice. This alone may be enough – if it causes some to perceive the world differently and more intensely. The game answers the call issued by my late teacher, the Passionate (referring to the Catholic order) present and cultural historian Thomas Berry, when he wrote that “when we see a flower, a butterfly, a tree, when we feel the evening breeze flow over us or wade in a stream of clear water, our natural response is immediate, intuitive, transforming, ecstatic. Everywhere we find ourselves invaded by the world of the sacred.”

Father Berry’s words struck a chord with me years ago. I grew up in New York’s Rockaways, with a great beach and the beautiful Atlantic as backdrop to all we did. It was not a neighborhood for the economic upper class, but all of us were enriched beyond measure by the beautiful infinitude that stretched before us at the beach wall. As the physicist Richard Feynman, who also grew up in the Rockaways, put it: “If we stand on the shore and look at the sea, we see the water, the waves breaking, the foam, the sloshing motion of the water, the sound, the air, the winds and the clouds, the sun and the blue sky, and light; there is sand and there are rocks of various hardness and permanence, color and texture. There are animals and seaward, hunger and disease, and the observer on the beach; there may be even happiness and thought.”

Such meditations prepare us to probe the ineffable wonders of life – through science and religion, in concert not in conflict.

In encouraging my students to see the world in this way, I have sought to provoke, not to preach. For some of my students, an exploration of baseball and the experiences, impulses, and feelings it provokes has prompted a way of looking at the world that makes them more capable of embracing ineffable joys, even as they develop the life of the mind.

Beyond this, studying the game as we do reveals how structural elements we associate with religion often are present in the apparently mundane. In this way, baseball illustrates the nature of the religious experience. This may cause some to investigate further. And that would be good.

Unrestrained by time, baseball encourages, almost requires in its most meaningful moments, an appreciation of living slowly and in the moment; the kind of differentiated experience that separates the sacred in life from the profane. This experience is where religion begins. As Rabbi Heschel wrote, it “is not a feeling for the mystery of living, or a sense of awe, wonder, or fear, which is the root of religion; but rather the question what to do with the feeling for the mystery of living, what to do with awe, wonder, or fear.” In a way, baseball’s window into the nature of religious experience is more revelatory, frankly, than the window offered by much of organized religion.

There are difficulties, of course, associated with the word religion – and much evil has come from attempting to take the religious experience and “explain” it – that is, to codify it in dogma. Wars have erupted over that dogma. A lust for power and greed has allowed the sanctification of the material world in God’s name: How high is one’s example? How much gold is in one’s chalice? All this for the greater glorification of something that is quite profane – something that can be labeled God but is anything but God in the sense that the greatest thinkers and lovers of religion use the word.

As beloved, sanctified even, as are Hall of Fame ballplayers, championship teams and revered figures of the game, there has always existed a matter of perspective in baseball. Arguments sometimes are heated. Thankfully, however, nobody ever had to go to war over the Babe.

But this book in the end is simply a vehicle to tell some stories that reveal a love of baseball – and (in some of the stories) display the joy of spiritual life. And maybe it shows that it is possible, even for a committed intellectual, to embrace both. It is, to repeat Tillich’s words, “to convince some readers of the hidden power of faith within themselves and of the infinite significance of that to which faith is related.”

Baseball can reveal something about the world and our ways of living in it that goes beyond what we see on the field. It can teach us to notice and embrace the ineffable beyond, to find the sacred amidst the profane. Just ask yourself: Do you, as you read these stories of baseball, see

or recognize elements you associate with religion and the spiritual life? Do you see things here that resonate with you in some dimension of your being, which might add value to your life? Do you see a way of looking at the world that might be useful? If so, baseball perhaps is a guide to viewing religion and the spiritual life differently, to living differently, to being in the world in a different way and seeing more in it.

Okay. Baseball, for most us anyways, is not the road to God – indeed it is not even a road to God. But, if given sensitive attention, it can awaken us to a dimension of life often missing in our contemporary world of hard facts and hard

science. We can learn, through baseball, to experience life more deeply. By embracing the ineffable joys of the “green fields of the mind,” we can enlarge our capacity to embrace the ineffable more generally. Baseball can teach us that living simultaneously the life of faith and the life of the mind is possible, even fun.

And each winter, as we long for the possibilities of spring with its awakening, and as we ponder the depths of mystical moments past in baseball and in life, we proclaim our creed:

Wait’ll Next Year!

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# National Polls - College

## NCAA Division I (presented by USA Today) Week 2 Poll (2/23/26)

1	LSU	8-0
2	UCLA	6-1
3	Texas	7-0
4	Georgia Tech	8-0
5	Mississippi State	8-0
6	Arkansas	6-1
7	Auburn	6-1
8	North Carolina	6-1
9	Georgia	6-1
10	Florida	7-1
11	Clemson	7-0
12	Southern Miss	6-1
13	Coastal Carolina	5-2
14	Oklahoma	7-0
15	NC State	5-1
16	Miami	9-0
17	Florida State	4-2
18	Oregon State	4-3
19	Tennessee	5-2
20	Wake Forest	6-1
21	Ole Miss	8-0
22t	Vanderbilt	6-2
22t	Texas A&M	7-0
24	Oregon	8-0
25	TCU	2-5

### Receiving Votes:

Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Louisville, Arizona State, USC, Alabama, Nebraska, UC-Santa Barbara, Kansas State, Michigan, Kent State, Kansas, Cal Poly, Oklahoma St. Louisiana Tech, Cal Baptist

## NCAA Division II (presented by Netting Professionals) Week 2 Poll (2/24/25)

1	Tampa (Fla.)	11-0
2	North Greenville (S.C.)	13-1
3	Catawba (N.C.)	11-1
4	Central Missouri	11-2
5	Texas-Tyler	12-2
6	Lenoir-Rhyne (N.C.)	9-1
7	Pittsburg State (Kan.)	13-0
8	West Florida	10-2
9	West Alabama	12-1
10	Westmont (Calif.)	9-2
11	Cal St. Monterey Bay	8-3
12	Augustana (S.D.)	8-0
13	North Georgia	12-3
14	Young Harris (Ga.)	11-3
15	Point Loma (Calif.)	12-3
16	Minn. St. Mankato	3-1
17	Colorado Mesa	10-2
18	Angelo State (Texas)	10-4
19	Grand Valley St. (Mich.)	6-1
20	Seton Hill (Pa.)	5-1
21	Belmont Abbey (N.C.)	9-3
22	Delta State (Miss.)	9-2
23	St. Mary's (Texas)	12-2
24	Drury (Mo.)	5-2
25	Francis Marion (S.C.)	13-1
26	Lander (S.C.)	9-5
27	Metro State (Colo.)	9-2
28	Felician (N.J.)	4-3
29	Harding (Ark.)	8-3
30t	Emporia St. (Kan.)	12-1
30t	Illinois-Springfield	7-3

**Others receiving votes:** Millersville (Pa.), UNC Pembroke, Wingate (N.C.), Molloy (N.Y.), Trevecca Nazarene (Tenn.), USC-Aiken, Flagler (Fla.), Cal State San Marcos, Rockhurst (Mo.), Wayne State University (Mich.), Jessup (Calif.), Fresno Pacific (Calif.), Wilmington (Del.), Slippery Rock (Pa.), California (Pa.), Frostburg State (Md.), Southern New Hampshire, West Chester (Pa.), St. Edward's (Texas).

## NCAA Division III (presented by Netting Professionals) Preseason Poll (1/27/26)

1	Wisconsin-Whitewater (24)	49-6
2	Denison (Ohio)	41-7
3	Endicott (Mass.) (1)	45-6
4	Johns Hopkins (Md.)	44-5
5	Kean (N.J.)	41-11
6	Trinity (Texas)	41-10
7	Lynchburg (Va.)	41-9
8	Rowan (N.J.)	38-12
9	Salisbury (Md.)	34-10
10	Salve Regina (R.I.)	36-9
11	Messiah (Pa.)	39-16
12	Claremont (Calif.)	35-15
13	La Verne (Calif.)	35-11
14	Wisconsin-Oshkosh	35-16
15	Wisconsin-La Crosse	35-11
16	Case Western (Ohio)	30-14-1
17	Webster (Mo.)	37-9
18	McMurry (Texas)	35-13
19	Pomona-Pitzer (Calif.)	32-17
20	Centre (Ky.)	32-11
21	Cortland (N.Y.)	31-13
22	Belhaven (Miss.)	34-15
23	Brockport (N.Y.)	36-5-2
24	Gustavus Adolphus (Minn.)	37-9
25	Concordia (Texas)	35-13
26	East Texas Baptist	31-16
27	Keystone (Pa.)	37-11
28	Penn State-Harrisburg	34-13-1
29	Baldwin Wallace (Ohio)	32-15
30	Cal Lutheran	27-14

**Others receiving votes:** Randolph-Macon (Va.), Emory (Ga.), Millsaps (Miss.), Wash.-St. Louis (Mo.), Adrian (Mich.), Whitworth (Wash.), Buena Vista (Iowa), Maryville (Tenn.), Mount Union (Ohio), Shenandoah (Va.), Chapman (Calif.), Chicago (Ill.), Bridgewater College (Va.), Illinois Wesleyan, Berry (Ga.), Middlebury (Vt.), Coe (Iowa), Ithaca (N.Y.), Misericordia (Pa.), Rutgers-Camden (N.J.), Millikin (Ill.), Penn State-Behrend, Bethany Lutheran (Minn.), Colby (Maine), Montclair State (N.J.), North Central (Ill.), Washington & Jefferson (Pa.)

## NAIA

### Pre-season Poll (11/5/26)

1	LSU Shreveport (La.) [19]	59-0
2	Georgia Gwinnett	56-7
3	Southeastern (Fla.)	47-15
4	Hope International (Calif.)	48-10
5	Tennessee Wesleyan	48-14
6	Cumberlands (Ky.)	50-12
7	Loyola (La.)	42-18
8	Webber International (Fla.)	44-15
9	Taylor (Ind.)	47-11
10	British Columbia	39-19
11	William Carey (Miss.)	38-14
12	Oklahoma Wesleyan	47-11
12	Missouri Baptist	42-11
14	Reinhardt (Ga.)	43-13
15	Arizona Christian	40-16-1
16	Concordia (Neb.)	41-13
17	Wayland Baptist (Texas)	42-19
18	Johnson (Tenn.)	36-18
19	Mid-America Christian (OK)	41-17
20	Texas A&M - Victoria	38-17
21	Lewis-Clark State (Idaho)	36-16
22	Bellevue (Neb.)	40-15
23	Columbia (Mo.)	43-11
24	Keiser (Fla.)	37-17
25	Central Methodist (Mo.)	35-15

**Receiving Votes:** Faulkner (Ala.), Kansas Wesleyan, Grand View (Iowa), St. Thomas (Fla.), IU Southeast (Ind.), Abraham Baldwin (Ga.), USAO (Okla.), Cumberland (Tenn.), Oakland City (Ind.), Ottawa (Kan.)

## Northwest Community College

### NWAC

#### Pre-Season Poll (2/12/26)

1	Lower Columbia
2	Linn-Benton
3	Spokane
4	Tacoma
5	Everett
6	Bellevue
7	Columbia Basin
8	Umpqua
9	Edmonds
10	Lane

## Junior College

### NJCAA Div. 1

#### Week 1 Poll (2/23/26)

1	Chipola	19-1
2	Walters State CC	14-2
3	Midland	12-0
4	Johnson County CC	15-1
5	McLennan CC	7-2
6	Florida SouthWestern State	14-4
7	Cloud County CC	9-1
8	San Jacinto-North	13-2
9	Blinn	10-5
10	LSU Eunice	13-1
11	Gaston	17-1
12	College of Southern Nevada	15-3
13	Iowa Western CC	8-3
14	Florence-Darlington Tech	13-5
15	Arizona Western	14-1
16	Panola	12-3
17	Hutchinson CC	8-1
18	Wabash Valley	11-4
19	Northwest Florida State	12-6
20	New Mexico JC	9-5
21	Salt Lake CC	7-6
22	Cochise	13-3
23	Shelton State CC	6-5
24	Georgia Highlands	16-6
25	Barton CC	9-0

**Receiving Votes:** Lake Land, Weatherford, Bossier Parish, Angelina, Central Arizona

## Junior College

### NJCAA Div. 3

#### Pre-Season Poll (1/20/26)

1	Rowan College South Jersey - Gloucester
2	Century
3	Dallas - Eastfield
4	SUNY Niagara
5	Brookdale CC
6	Surry CC
7	Dallas - Brookhaven
8	Oakton CC
9	Northern Essex CC
10	Hudson Valley CC
11	Suffolk CC
12	Terra State
13	Northampton CC
14	Herkimer College
15	Genesee CC

**Receiving Votes:** CC of Rhode Island, Joliet, Owens, Caldwell Tech, Dallas-Richland, Alexandria, RCSJ-Cumberland, St. Cloud Tech, Monre-Bronx, Riverland, Salem

## Junior College

### NJCAA Div. 2

#### Pre-Season Poll (1/20/26)

1	Pasco-Hernando State
2	Pearl River CC
3	East Central CC
4	Heartland CC
5	Madison
6	South Mountain CC
7	Southeastern CC
8	Iowa Central CC
9	Kellogg CC
10	Frederick CC
11	St. Johns River State
12	Catawba Valley CC
13	South Arkansas
14	Jones
15	Parkland
16	Kankakee CC
17	Wallace CC-Dothan
18	Kirkwood CC
19	South Florida State
20	Brunswick CC
21	Pima CC
22	Lansing CC
23	Northern Oklahoma College-Enid
24	North Central Missouri
25	Mississippi Gulf Coast CC

**Receiving Votes:** Lackawanna, Hagerstown, Cuyahoga, Pitt, Elgin

## California Community College

### Week 5 Poll (2/23/26)

1	FRESNO CITY, Central Valley	14-0
2.	SANTA ANA, Orange Empire	12-1
3.	OHLONE, Coast South	13-1
4.	CYPRESS, Orange Empire	10-3
5	PALOMAR, Pacific Coast	10-3
6	GLENDALE, Western State South	10-3
7	SAN JOAQUIN DELTA, Big 8	10-3
8.	SANTA ROSA JC, Big 8	10-3
9.	EL CAMINO, South Coast	11-2
10	MODESTO, Big 8	11-2
11.	ANTELOPE VALLEY, Western St. South	12-2
12.	SKYLINE, Coast North	11-3
13.	GOLDEN WEST, Orange Empire	10-4
14	IRVINE VALLEY, Orange Empire	11-3
15	FOLSOM LAKE, Big 8	10-3
16.	ALLAN HANCOCK, Western St. North	10-3
17.	FULLERTON, Orange Empire	11-5
18.	RIVERSIDE CITY, Orange Empire	10-5
19	WEST VALLEY, Coast South	9-4
20.	CITRUS, Western State South	9-4
21.	SIERRA, Big 8	9-4
22.	COLLEGE OF SAN MATEO, Coast North	9-4
23.	SADDLEBACK, Orange Empire	9-5
24.	ORANGE COAST, Orange Empire	9-5
25.	COLLEGE OF THE DESERT, Inland Emp.	9-3

**The Baseball Collegian**  
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# THE BASEBALL COLLEGIAN

## Keep Punching

*"People don't realize they have to keep hitting. They don't think their punches are landing."*

*-- Kevin Elko*

LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers did something a few years ago that no team in NBA history had ever done before -- down three games to one in the NBA Finals they came back to win the championship.

It reminded me of a story from the book "The Sender" by Kevin Elko and Bill Beausay:

There was a boxer named Cyclone Hart. And he loses this fight to an Italian named Vito. And at the end of the fight they were in the locker room and there was a curtain between them. And this guy Vito started talking to his trainer. Cyclone Hart could hear him. And Vito said, "He kept on hitting me with that left in my ribs. And I thought to myself that if he hits me one more time with that left, I'm going to quit. But he never hit me again. I don't know why, he just quit hitting me."



by Steve Gilbert

Cyclone Hart, on the other side of the curtain, started to cry. And he said quietly to his trainer, "I didn't think my left was getting there."

The Cavaliers had no idea what would be the game or the play that would turn the series around. They simply kept punching.

We see examples of this all the time in baseball. A player goes through a rough patch -- they can't seem to get the big hit, or make a big pitch when they need it. They might go a week without a hit or find themselves hitting .200 after a month of the season.

The ones who will ultimately find success stick to their plan and do not allow discouragement to creep into their heads. They immerse themselves in their process. And they keep punching. Every. Single. Day.

Today, whatever line of work you are in, remember to keep punching. Make that one more call. Try one more different method to get through to your troubled student. Send your work to one more publisher. Don't get caught up in the discouragement.

Keep punching. They next one you throw may end up being the one that turns the tide in your favor and wins you the fight.

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.**

