

## Overcoming Low Confidence

“Baseball is a game of failure, coached by negative people, in a misinformed environment.” – Tom House. Unfortunately this is an accurate quote that describes baseball as a whole. Coaches and parents cannot change the fact that baseball is a game of failure. But coaches and parents can strictly use positive affirmations to create affirmative visions so players can focus better and remain confident. Moreover, coaches should be teaching based on sound information and welcome questions and theories that test their teachings.

As a player it is paramount to close the gap between the person you know you are, the person that people see, and the person that you want to be. Often times this is the main area where kids mentally break down. They view the person that people see through the eyes of their parents, coaches, or team mates who discuss results (winning, not making errors, not striking out, etc.) rather than the process (seeing the ball, maintaining balance, enjoying the game). This makes them want to be the person who wins, doesn't make errors, and doesn't strike out. This is a recipe to eviscerate confidence because baseball is a game of failure. But being the person who sees the ball, maintains balance, and enjoys the game is a goal that can be attained during every performance. Kids know they can't be the person who always wins, doesn't make errors, and doesn't strike out. So it makes no sense training them to want to be that person.

## Using Technology to Boost Confidence

In today's age there are gadgets to measure and provide feedback on nearly every kinematic movement. However, such data is useless and confusing unless it can be used to simplify the game. One area where this data is useful is when measuring hitter's trigger to ball contact time. This can be done using high speed video analysis or with a gadget. Once the hitter hits his own ball to contact time the hitter can make good use of on deck preparation by timing the pitcher so that he is ready to hit the first pitch when batting. When the hitter understands exactly when he has to pull the trigger a large cloud of doubt erases and confidence explodes.

To understand when a hitter must pull the trigger just think about pitch speed. For every 1 MPH a ball travels 1.466 feet per second (FPS). So if a pitcher is throwing 70 MPH the pitch is traveling 102.62 FPS. The start of swing to ball contact speed is measured in hundredths of a second and this information

is only useful if the hitter can think of it in terms of “how many feet away should the pitch be before I pull the trigger?” Using this information we can determine that for every 1/100<sup>th</sup> of a second a 70 MPH pitch travels 1.0262 feet. So if a hitter has a start of swing to contact speed of .150 the hitter must pull the trigger when the ball is about 15’ away. So in the on deck circle the hitter would envision the swing starting when the pitch was 15’ away.

Looking at this same information for a pitch traveling 90 MPH we determine that the pitch travels 131.99 FPS. So for every 1/100<sup>th</sup> of a second the ball travels 1.3199 feet. That same hitter with a .150 start of swing to contact speed would need to pull the trigger when the pitch was 19.7985 feet away. That is a tough task to complete. This is why it is so important to make the swing as simple and efficient as possible. If a hitter can get the start of swing to contact speed down to .110 then that hitter could wait until the pitch was a little more than 14 feet away. The longer a hitter can spend evaluating the pitch the more comfortable hitting becomes and confidence skyrockets.

### Encourage Improvements, Even Mediocre Ones

Young players respond to encouragement much better than instruction. When a player makes a small improvement don’t correct him, encourage him! For instance when first learning to rotate the hips when hitting the hitter may only rotate 10 degrees instead of the optimal 45-60 degrees. But if on the previous swing the hitter rotates 5 degrees and the subsequent one was 10 degrees then encourage the effort. This is a step in the right direction! All too often coaches view only that individual swing in isolation to the others and then compare it to the perfect swing. No kids are perfect and that 5 degree improvement will be seen from the kid’s perspective as if he has done something bad by improving if he is continuously being compared to perfection. Then that 5 improvement will dissipate along with the kid’s confidence and enthusiasm for the game.

This issue often comes up when talking to parents about their kid’s progression. Typically I get the “we go one step forward one step back” speech where the parent knows a little about the mechanics and is excited to teach it to his kid and the kid makes some progression but then plateaus. My response to this problem is first asking the kid whether or not he understands what to do. Almost always the kid knows exactly what to do. I then ask the parent how he is instructing. Almost always I get the response that he tells him to rotate the hips and rotate over the front foot and get the lower half into the ball. I then ask what the purpose of the instruction is if the kid already knows how to do it? The

response is because he isn't doing it! I then ask the kid how he responds to the correction and he typically says he changes something but every time he makes an adjustment he feels like he is doing something else wrong...and the game just isn't fun anymore, I hate baseball, I hate my dad, I quit!

Hmmm...it is easy to see in this scenario where the problems lie. The parent is trying his best to help the kid, the kid is trying his best to please his parent but every time he changes something the change is no good. He gets frustrated because he feels like he's damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. To correct this disconnect the parent must see the performance in a temporal context. Put another way, the coach must think about the performance as it relates to previous performances. If it is getting better then encourage it. If it is getting worse make a slight correction. If the kid isn't having fun then see what the ratio between encouragement and instruction is. Get a two sided pitch counter if it helps. For every positive encouragement click the white side, for every instruction click the black side. Nickname the pitch counter the happy meter. Check it often. Once the coach realizes that his instruction to encouragement ratio was 10:1 he soon makes the training sessions much more fun and everyone is happy and performing better. It is like magic!