

Enjoy the Process of Preparation

Relish the Process of Improvement and Preparation to Get Results in Competition

By Brad Woodall, Former Major League Pitcher and Owner of Woodall Training

Each year as the pennant races are done and the playoffs begin, it is an exciting time on many levels. The fan in me is excited to see the games just to enjoy the magnitude of the games and to see who wins. The part of me that still thinks like a player lives vicariously through the players who have worked hard through the entire off-season, pre-season, and endured the grueling day-to-day grind of the regular season to help their team get to the playoffs.



I enjoy this time of year as a coach because all of the little things in each game are exposed and critiqued more than in the regular season. While we focus more on the strikeouts, home runs, and diving catches during the regular season, the routine plays that are botched or executed correctly in pressure situations are analyzed on TV, Radio, and other media. All of the cutoffs and relays, sacrifice bunts, and pitchers executing their pitches in big situations are now perceived as more important in these games. The reality is that it is always important for players to execute their fundamentals every day, and to prepare themselves accordingly.

A good portion of the workouts I have with young players in an instructional session focus on fine-tuning the mechanics of making the specific plays that they would make in the game. Proper footwork on backhanded grounders, drive the ball to the opposite field, executing the mechanics of throwing a fastball low and away, going back on fly balls, etc. We will make the same play in a controlled setting dozens of times consecutively until the player truly learns the mechanics of that particular play. While many players may touch on some of these plays in infield and batting practice, they often do not devote a segment of their workouts to one particular play such as hitting a low pitch, or a change-up down in the strike zone. By focusing on the detailed mechanics of executing specific plays over and over, the player will execute that play in the game more often and experience more success on the field.

Every great player I have ever worked with in the major leagues truly enjoys the process of getting better and preparing to have success in competition. The great players of today work as hard as ever on the little things that make them great. Making a routine of taking dozens of ground balls to the backhand every day, 30-40 double play feeds to the middle infielders per day, the pitchers in the bullpen fine tuning their mechanics with drill work and throwing one pitch 20 times in a row (ex. Fastball low and away to a right-handed hitter) so that they can execute these plays better on a daily basis and on the big stage of the playoffs and World Series.

In interviews, you will hear players often asked about how excited they are to play in the playoffs and on the big stage. Many times the player's response is about their preparation. "We are focused on preparing for the games", or "We feel we are prepared for these games" or "We have worked hard all year to put ourselves in this position" are truly honest answers from the players. When they mention their preparation, they are referring to all of the time they spend getting their fundamentals, their bodies, and their mental preparation in position to execute in any situation that comes along in the game.

So when you are watching the MLB playoffs (or big games in any sport) and wonder how these players can play so well under such intense pressure, you can give a lot of credit their preparation. Each big play that you see made, you can assume that the player has prepared for that play or situation countless times in practice. In the batting cages, in the bullpen, and mental preparation before the games are where these plays are being made before we see them on TV. The great players understand the value of preparation, work ethic, and they all build confidence from their preparation to make the big (and little) plays in every game on the big stage.

So to practice like a pro, you must enjoy the process of preparing for all of the plays you will make in a game. Consistent drill work and developing a routine of working on the mechanics of each play are essential for steady improvement. The games are much more fun if there are no surprises and you can execute when it counts.

Train Smart, Create your own luck, and Have Fun!!

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