

WHAT I LOVE ABOUT BASEBALL

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As I write this article, my son is finishing up his little league baseball career. He is 12 years old, so he won't be able to play in the league after this spring. Our team did well this season, so next week we are playing in the Knox County tournament. It is double elimination, so I know I may only have two more games to coach him. After all the hours of practice and games over the last six or seven years, this is it.

My wife accuses me of being too competitive, expecting that he will eventually be able to play college and major league baseball. She's part right – I might be too competitive. But my reason for encouraging and pushing Jedidiah in baseball has to do more with the opportunity for him to learn lessons more than actually continuing his career. There are important life lessons to learn while competing on the field. What are those lessons? I'm glad you asked. Here are a few.

Don't let past failure keep you from succeeding. There are a lot of failures in baseball. Every time you swing and miss the ball, you have to put that out of your mind and get ready for the next pitch. If you strike out, you need to learn from it and work to be successful your next time at bat. If you make an error in the field, put it out of your mind and make the next play. We all have the tendency to focus on our mistakes. You need to learn from the mistake and focus on succeeding the next time.

Don't blame anyone else. In little league, umpires may have a slightly larger strike zone than in the major leagues. Nobody wants to have a game where there is nothing but walks. As a batter, some of the pitches might be a little outside or inside, maybe a little high or low. Don't blame a strikeout on the umpire. When you get that good pitch, jump on it. Admit when you should have hit the ball, don't shift the blame. If you make an error in the field, don't try to find something or someone to blame it on. A lot of adults could learn this lesson.

Be prepared. Success on the ballfield actually occurs during all the hours of work outside of the game. Taking grounders for hours at home. Throwing, hitting, and fielding are things we have spent more time on at home than at games or even official practices. Nothing can replace work to get better. Oftentimes today's success depends on yesterday's work.

Know the situation. We constantly stress to think about what you are going to do if the ball is hit to you before the pitcher ever throws the ball. You have to be ready. When you come up to bat, you need to think about things like how many outs there are and are there runners on base. Be aware of what is going on around you.

Be part of the team and do your part. Rarely can one person win or lose a baseball game. It takes a team to win the game. You have to be part of the team and accomplish your role. It is when an entire team works together that you can win. If someone is being less than successful, give them some encouragement.

Evaluate yourself. It is easy to see mistakes that other people make, but we usually don't want to see the mistakes we make. In every situation instead of pointing out other's faults, look inward and see what did you do good and what could you have done better. Work to learn from that evaluation.

Be the best you can be. We are often satisfied comparing ourselves to others, particularly if we think we are better. There is nothing wrong with having this comparison. But you can't let it stop there. The goal is not just to be the best player out there, but to work to be the best you can be. Let's not try to be a little better, let's be a lot better.

These are just a few of the lessons that I learned playing baseball, and have worked to enable my son to learn. I have seen many of these develop in his life. Makes me proud to have been his coach. I'm even more proud to be his Dad.