

A Love for the Game...

By Coach Mike Jackson

Do you have “a love of the game”? When ever we put on our spikes and suit up for a baseball game, we need to remember the history and tradition this game has behind it. Its America’s game, our past time, and certain responsibilities come along with playing it.

We owe the game; it doesn’t owe us. We owe the game identity. We owe it integrity. We owe it tradition. We have to be committed to the game first. The history is used as a guide, and the future of the game is up to us to preserve. The “love of the game” is the most important aspect. If you’re playing for ego or money, the game will eat you up. Yes, professionals get paid to play, but they don’t play to get paid. Ask any of them if a great individual performance in a losing game matters to them? They play to win and win as a team.

This great game and how we approach it is of the utmost importance. It starts with the image you present to the public. How you respect your opponent, and the officials – good calls or bad. The respect you then have for yourselves, your coaches, your teammates, and all the people that work hard to make your experience the best it can be no matter what level of play you achieve.

Your image ranks high on the list in how you approach the game. Personal appearance is reflected in your grooming, jewelry, hairstyle and most importantly, how you wear your uniform. Respecting tradition and professionalism starts at the earliest age and lasts throughout your career. Take your image serious, as a player and a team. Remember: Look Sharp – Be Sharp!

Umpires should be respected. They aren’t someone for you to complain to or debate calls with. Coaches will handle that part of the game the way they see fit in the best interest of the team. You should address them with “Mr.” or “Sir”. They will appreciate your respect and it may go further than you think during the game. It’s the hardest job on the field.

Hustle. Oh yes, how could we discuss the “playing of the game” without this coming up. Remember hustle is not physical, but mental. Many forms of displaying hustle is in your actions... but its doesn’t just mean running out a ground or fly ball. It could be shown simply by being mentally in the game. Every pitch, every inning. Yelling “back!” on a pick from the dugout, or having pride in making good throws when a ball is thrown around the infield after an out is made are forms of hustle. Some quick examples:

- Running 100% on all balls put in play.
- Bouncing on a off the field between innings.
- Returning to your defensive position with a little life in your step after every play.
- Backing up plays regardless if you have been instructed to do so; a la Derek Jeter.
- Accurate throws from the outfield to the chest – not just flipping the ball in.
- Throws from Catcher to Pitcher on a line – Don’t lob it.
- Catchers bouncing out to the mound on visits and bouncing back to the plate.
- Sprint to first base on a Walk – you will be surprised how this can intimidate defenses.

- Maximum effort on every play... Never concede that you're out – always assume an error will be made.

Never allow another team to out-hustle you. They may have more talent, but you can always have more hustle. Believe that no matter the battle or the talent difference of your opponent, you can achieve success if you bring 100% hustle to every play of every inning. This is something you owe yourself, your team and the game.

Remember this about hustle... you're seldom right when you don't hustle, and you are always right when you do! The image set with every form of hustle gets you the right type of attention; from umpires and coaches that respect it to the scouts that look for it.

Little things. Ah yes, the small things that matter the most and go the furthest in your success. Don't take them for granted. Think and perform all the little things required to play the game correctly. You don't want Murphy's Law to pop up at the time you forget to back up a base or didn't slide at Home because you assumed you were going to be safe. Play the game hard and be in every play no matter from the field or the dugout. Respect the game first and everything it represents. Understand this is a game of failure and that mistakes are part of the game. Part of the game is how you handle the mistakes, whether yours or a teammates. Always stay positive, always pick a team mate up when he's down or has made a error, and always show respect.

Have Pride, Class and Hustle on and off the field, and you will see what having "*a love for the game*" will return to you.

Good Luck,
Coach Jackson

***It's not where we are, it's where we are going
It isn't what we have; it is what we do with it.***