

THE PLAYER VIRTUES

Learn them. Practice them. Become them.

POISE – FOCUS – HEART – SPORTSMANSHIP

This coach believes that The Player Virtues are the things that every athlete has total control over 100 percent of the time. Like skills, virtues must be practiced often and over a period of time; you cannot just "turn them on" when you want to. They must become habit, by discipline, before they will ever begin to define you as a competitor. All players on this team are expected to, at all times, practice and increasingly demonstrate poise, focus, heart, and sportsmanship.

POISE //you always have total control over your attitude//

- **Remain calm, cool and collected in all situations.**
 - Practice self-control, mind and body over emotions.
 - Control anger—do not let opponents know you are frustrated.
 - Respond in a positive way to adversity.
 - Never get too emotionally high or low.
 - Do not allow game situations to affect your attitude.
 - Before you compete, do a mental exercise by envisioning all the adverse things that could happen to you and then see yourself responding to them in a positive way. That way if any of those things end up actually happening, you'll be much more likely to react the way you want to.
- **Maintain a healthy and correct perspective.**
 - No matter what happens, it is still just a game.
 - You cannot change the past—don't dwell on previous mistakes, plays, calls, missed opportunities, or games.
 - Always be in the "now" moment. Worry about the present.
 - Understand that you are defined by much more than just being a baseball player, so never let sports—or especially a single performance—be the source for your self-worth.
 - Keep your priorities in proper order: (1) Faith, (2) Family, (3) School, and (4) Sports. Find ways to balance the responsibilities.
- **Play with confidence but never with arrogance.**
 - Know your limitations and be aggressive up to that point.
 - Be coachable—you can always learn more and get better.
 - Remain humble when experiencing success. Never showboat or show up an opponent. Win with class.
 - Remain positive when experiencing failure. Never show an opponent signs of defeat or submission. Lose with dignity.

FOCUS //you always have control over your mind//

- **Understand the game.**
 - Baseball is a game of strategy as well as skill. Figuring out the reasons behind the concepts you learn and plays we run will help you prepare as well as anticipate the opponents next move, allowing you to perform better.
 - Instead of simply *watching* a baseball game from the dugout, in the stands, or on TV, study it and make yourself better. Find patterns and correlations between what the players are doing and the result of the plays—good or bad.
 - Know our game plan and stick to it. Recognize the opponent's game plan and make necessary adjustments.
 - Remember the tendencies of both your opponents and teammates, as well as your own, and plan & play accordingly.
 - During practice, always stop your coach and ASK QUESTIONS when you do not understand what you are to do or why you are to do it.
- **Eliminate the distractions.**
 - Concentrate only on the task at hand. One pitch at a time, starting with this one.
 - If an opponent "gets into your head," it is your fault for allowing him in there. Kick him out immediately and restore your focus so you can execute your game plan.
 - Remember that when you are distracted and make a mistake, you have not lost your skills. All you have lost is your focus—and you can gain that back anytime you want.
 - When your mind is cluttered with non-baseball tasks and/or personal problems take a moment and write everything that comes to mind down on paper and tell yourself you will deal with that piece of paper later. This should clear your mind.
 - Recognize petty distractions for what they are—almost humorous and not really that big of a deal.
 - Remember that boos, jeers, and jokes from opposing players or fans are just as sweet to hear as cheers, applause, and compliments from your own. It shows that you are already in their heads distracting them so don't give that edge back.
- **Keep the intensity.**
 - There is no lead that cannot be lost. There is no deficit that cannot be overcome. Never "check out" no matter the score.
 - You can "win" six innings yet still lose a baseball game by "losing" that one other one. Show up every inning.
 - Baseball is the only major sport that does not operate with a game clock. It is not over until you record every needed out, no matter how long it takes. Play all the way until the very end.
 - You've probably been told to "practice like you play" but I believe in simply saying, "you will play as you practice" meaning, whether you realize it or not, the level of intensity you set for yourself during practice will become your constant level of intensity in games.

HEART //you always have total control over your effort//

- **Develop a desire to compete that is greater than your desire to win.**
 - The core desire in every athlete should be to compete; to push himself to the extent of his ability and force others to do the same, thus improving the quality of every practice and game.
 - Work just as hard at practice competing against your teammates as you do during games competing against your opponents.
 - No matter the team, no matter the talent, no matter the score, no matter the playing field, and no matter the past, you can always find some satisfaction and pride by choosing to compete.
 - Welcome competition as a challenge to be enjoyed more than anything else in sports.
 - Never give up when behind, never let up while ahead.
- **Hustle at all times on the baseball field.**
 - Not everybody can run fast but everybody can run hard.
 - It is embarrassing to be out-hustled. A team that hustles gains a psychological advantage over opponents by setting the tone and gaining the perception as the team more ready and willing to play.
 - Sprint to and from positions when taking and leaving the field or after being called out. Sprint to first base on every base on balls, weak ground ball, and pop-up. Catchers retrieve every ball possible—win the “race” against the opposing on-deck batter.
- **Be brave despite any existence of fear and adversity.**
 - Show courage when afraid of the ball. Batters should stand in the box at all times, infielders must always square up on every hard-hit ground ball and short-hop throw, and outfielders are to lay out for any ball that is catchable (at the appropriate times in a game).
 - Have the guts to play with some pain. Don't avoid physical discomfort when playing (sports take a toll on the body—you'll get sore), be willing to play through *minor* injuries when there is no risk of further harm, and do not overreact to pain.
 - Overcome any fear of failure you may have. Athletes who play timid or afraid to make a mistake will never reach their full potential. Play free, in a way that you see the risk as always being worth the possible reward. It is always better to attempt to go take victory for yourselves than to play simply not to lose.
- **Be willing to pay the price of champions by training hard.**
 - Do your part, in season and out of season, to help your team outwork every team you will play. Participate year-round in conditioning and weight training programs.
 - Empty yourself by leaving everything you have on the field by the end of every practice and game.
 - Get up after you've been knocked down (literally and figuratively). Nobody can defeat your spirit; it can only die from within.
 - It is no coincidence that the best conditioned teams win the most games and the players who work the hardest get the “luckiest.”
 - Calculate and make the sacrifices needed to reach your goals.

SPORTSMANSHIP //you always have total control over how you treat others//

- **Respect the rules of the game.**
 - Know, understand and always play by them.
 - Cheating of any kind for any reason will not be tolerated.
 - If an opponent wins a game by breaking the rules, we gain the greater victory by keeping them.
- **Respect your teammates.**
 - You will not complain about (a lack of) playing time.
 - You will not make fun of or belittle any teammate.
 - You will encourage every teammate to accomplish each and every task he has been given.
- **Respect your opponents.**
 - You will treat every opponent as you would wish to be treated yourself, regardless of school, talent-level, race, age, sex, or any other possible difference.
 - You will offer to shake hands with and congratulate every opposing player after every game—win or lose.
 - You will give credit wherever credit is due.
 - As the host team, go out of your way to make them feel welcome before the game. Take care of their needs as best you can.
- **Respect your coaches.**
 - You will follow every order from any coach at any level.
 - You will address and refer to every coach by using the title "Coach" on and off the field during the season.
 - Any question/disagreement you have with a coach or a coach's decision should be addressed in private with that coach and never in front of the rest of the team.
- **Respect the officials.**
 - You will adhere to every request and demand an umpire gives you or one of your teammates.
 - You will not argue any call (leave it to the coaches).
 - You will address the umpire as "Sir" always.
 - You will thank the umpires for calling our games any chance you get following the conclusion of a game.
- **Respect the team rules.**
 - Always be honest.
 - No drug, alcohol, or tobacco use.
 - Do not engage in any illegal activity.
 - Refrain from using offensive speech.
 - No stealing.
 - Honor your parents.
 - Respect girls/women in speech and action.
 - Always represent your school in a positive way.

THE GAMEPLAN

Learn it. Understand it. Execute it.

1. **Get quality pitching performances.**
2. **Play great defense.**
3. **Find ways to get on base.**
4. **Score with runners in position.**

The Gameplan is the over-arching strategy of this coach and shall be the focus of this team. Execution of The Gameplan will give us the best chance of winning any baseball game by applying pressure on our opponents and forcing them to be at their best in order to compete with us. All team and player performance goals should be rooted in The Gameplan, as it drives most practice drills, specific game plan strategies, and personnel decisions. The Gameplan was in mind while choosing the individuals to comprise this team and will continually be used to evaluate performance and dictate playing time throughout the season.

CREED:

When we win a game, it will not be because we are better people or even necessarily better ballplayers than our opponents. When we win a game, it will not be because we got lucky or were fortunate. **When we win a game, it WILL be because we executed our Gameplan better than the other team did theirs.**

When we lose a game, it will not be because we are a bad team, I am a bad coach, you are a bad player, or any single one of us is a bad person. When we lose a game, it will not be because the umpire made a bad call, the weather was not perfect, or the field was flawed. **When we lose a game, it WILL be because we did not execute our Gameplan as well as the other team did theirs.**

Our real competition is the game of baseball. That is what we will work to master. Our focus needs to be on a single object that is a baseball, never on the size of the opponent or the name on their jersey. Our focus needs to be on a single object that is a baseball, never on the scoreboard or your personal statistics. **Our focus needs to be on a single object that is a baseball—where it is right now and what you are going to do with it when it arrives.**

GET QUALITY PITCHING PERFORMANCES. Pitch to contact. Work ahead in the count by throwing first pitch strikes and following a basic pitching philosophy. Work at a pace that keeps the defense in rhythm. Pitch efficiently by throwing strikes at least 2/3 of the time. Pitch effectively by demonstrating command of a fastball and at least one off-speed pitch.

Performance goals: No free passes or wild pitches, 15-20 first pitch strikes per game (min), Throw 66.7% strikes (min), 15-20 pitches per inning (max), ERA < 4.00
Key stat(s): ERA, WHIP, OBA, BB/7

PLAY GREAT DEFENSE. Do not give opponents "more than 3 outs" per inning. Know your responsibilities at all times and in any given game situation. Make the routine plays. Continually practice the fundamentals needed to field your position. Throw out the lead runner whenever possible. Think before every pitch—always know what you will do with the ball if it is hit to you and always move to the correct spot when the ball is not hit to you. Hustle to backup teammates.

Performance goals: Aim to commit no errors. Do not allow any stolen bases. Have zero pass balls. Aim to make no mental mistakes.
Key Stat(s): Fielding Percentage, Errors

FIND WAYS TO GET ON BASE. Be a smart and disciplined hitter by not chasing bad pitches yet always being ready to hit the first fastball thrown for a strike that is down the middle of the plate. The walk is the easiest and most productive element of team run production. Work the count into your favor (2-0, 3-1) and then reward yourself if you get a good pitch to hit. Follow a basic hitting philosophy of shrinking your strike zone while ahead in the count and expanding it while behind. Demonstrate the ability to bunt for a basehit in order to force the defense out of position. Avoid pop-ups; hit line drives and hard-hit ground balls.

Performance goal: Walks should outnumber strikeouts by a 2-to-1 margin.
Key Stat(s): On-base percentage, BB/K, Batting Average

SCORE WITH RUNNERS IN POSITION. Understand that RBIs are bigger than hits, and so, make every effort to not overswing. Use more of the middle and opposite side of the field in RBI situations. Avoid the double play by bunting, stealing, and executing the hit-and-run play. Aim to drive the ball into a gap for a basehit. If you cannot get a basehit, make a "productive out" by hitting behind the runner in order to advance him. If you cannot get a productive out, just put the ball in play to allow the chance of an error. At the VERY least, swing at the 3rd strike—giving yourself the chance of putting the ball in play.

Performance goals: Must score all runners who find themselves on 2nd base with no outs. Must score all runners who find themselves on 3rd base with less than two outs. Do not strikeout looking with any runners on base.
Key Stat(s): RBIs, Men LOB, strikeouts (especially "looking"), Slugging Percentage

BASEBALL IS A GAME OF FAILURE

Baseball is a game of failure because the all-time highest career batting average, held by Ty Cobb, is .366. That means that arguably the greatest hitter in the history of the game succeeded in getting a hit only 36 percent of the times he stepped up to the plate. Barry Bonds, the home run king, walked back to his dugout having just struck out over twice as often as he did after going deep. Ricky Henderson, the career leader in stolen bases, was also caught stealing more times than anyone else who's ever played the game.

Baseball is a game of failure because as a pitcher, you are automatically given room for error; you only need to throw three strikes before you throw four balls in order to get somebody out. Baseball is a game of failure because plays that should be made but aren't get recorded as errors--displayed on the scoreboard and printed in the box score for all to see. Yet plays that are made that probably shouldn't be--even the ones that only come around once in a lifetime--are noted as nothing more than one of the twenty-seven outs needed over the course of a single game.

Baseball is a game of failure because most people are not strong enough inside themselves to play it. To even begin to understand the game you must not only be okay with failing, you must expect it, accept it, and even at times embrace it. If you step into a batter's box in fear of striking out...if you take the mound afraid to pitch inside...if you ever hope the ball doesn't get hit to you, do not play baseball because you will not stand a chance.

Baseball is a game of failure because baseball is difficult--perhaps the most difficult sport one can play. Baseball players are the toughest athletes in the world. For they play a game they cannot beat. Instead they work to minimize their failure--they compete to fail at it less than their opponents. And while one man finds victory over another, the game of baseball always wins. We are all left humbled by the greatest sport on earth.