

THE BOGUS BOREDOM OF BASEBALL

By Devin Blish

“Baseball was, is, and always will be the best game in the world to me” is a quote from one of the most legendary baseball players ever, Babe Ruth. The majority of baseball players would, without a doubt, agree with Ruth. Those who do not play or know very little about baseball may think it’s a very boring, slow-paced game.

In the summer of 1839 in Cooperstown, New York, Abner Doubleday invented the game of baseball, which eventually became America’s national pastime. But today, most people would criticize the game, calling it “slow” and “boring.” Is it the two-to-three-hour games or the delay between pitches? After much thought, I still refute these comments. Here’s why.

People that only played little league will usually say that they just sat in the outfield and did nothing. But in reality, they didn’t want to play or didn’t try.

At the next level, such as travel ball or the high school team, the rules and excitement level change. The field gets bigger (from around 200-225 feet to around 400 feet) and the basepaths expand (from 60-90 feet). Not only does the field change, but now you can lead off the bases and not have to wait for the pitcher to pitch, along with new rules that make the games more engaging to play and watch. Friendships develop as a result as well.

“My favorite part about playing the game is being out in the sun and playing with my friends,” freshman baseball player Weston Clare said.

On the field, you need to remain prepared as you never know when the ball may approach your mitt. In addition, you always have to keep moving because there is always action, even when you’re not in the play.

“You always have to be ready as it’s a thinking game and very technical,” Clare said. “There is much more to it than people think, like being in the right spot at the right time and proper base running.”

Even though attendance has gone down for Major League Baseball (MLB) games over the past few years, Spring Training attendance has increased. Spring Training is the preseason for the MLB located in Arizona and Florida from March to the beginning of April. Fans have the opportunity to watch their favorite teams play and meet some of their favorite players at a cheaper price. MLB hit its peak for total attendance at 79 million in 2007, but it decreased to 68 million in 2019. On the other hand,



PHOTO BY KYLE LLEWELLYN

Doubleday Field is a baseball field that is located in Cooperstown, NY two blocks away from the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Every year from 1940 to 2008, a Hall of Fame Game was played there featuring two MLB teams.

Spring Training ticket sales have seen an increase of up to 3.5 million attendees annually for both the American and National Leagues.

“I think the first step to help raise attendance around the league is to advertise the games more,” freshman pitcher Felix Miranda said. “They should talk more about the games after it’s over and increase commercials to entice fans to watch or actually go to the games.”

If the MLB could create new ways for fans to get involved, that could raise attendance at all baseball games. This way, more people could engage in the game and better understand the value of it.

A fun event that the MLB added in 2017 is the Players’ Weekend, a three-game stretch toward the end of the season. Players get to wear creative cleats and colorful uniforms with a nickname of their choice on their jerseys. Some nicknames include “El Mago” from Chicago Cubs shortstop Javier Baez and “Flying Squirrel” from New York Mets left fielder Jeff McNeil. MLB uses this weekend to see how creative players can get, so



PHOTO BY ASHLEY M.

Cleveland Indians Francisco Lindor’s nickname was “Mr. Smile” during Players’ Weekend in 2018.

they can connect with fans.

“This is awesome for baseball and will totally increase attendance to every game,” Clare said. “It’ll be fun to see the other ideas that the MLB comes up with, they are definitely on the right track.”

Opponents of baseball indicate that the game lasts too long and is slow-paced. However, other major sports like football, basketball, and hockey also have games that range in length similar to baseball, but it might be the pace of play in baseball that receives much of the criticism. Regarding the aforementioned critique, the MLB is finding ways to shorten the length of games and increase pace of play.

Recently, leagues have added changes including a limit of mound visits, a possible in-between pitch clock and shorter commercial time between innings.

“The MLB and baseball at all levels are improving the pace of the game which is good to see,” Miranda said. “It is going to be hard to shorten the game even more in the upcoming years, though.”

The current 2020 baseball season has been paused as the coronavirus continues to spread. It is uncertain whether the season will resume, but one thing is clear: The game of baseball is on the right base and definitely far from boring.



PHOTO BY JAKE N.

Dodger Stadium had the most average fans in attendance during the 2019 season, with an average of 49,065 fans.

THE MENTAL SIDE OF SPORTS

By Mason Hanshaw

Any athlete who has ever played a sport knows what a team practice usually consists of — running drills, working on passes, perfecting a swing and whatever else it may be. However, it's important to know that practicing the mental game is just as, if not more, essential as practicing physical skill.

I've been playing baseball ever since I could pick up a bat and throw a ball. Working on mechanics is a fundamental and crucial part of any sport for players of a young age, so naturally, the physical attributes of baseball had always been my prime focus while practicing and developing skills.

However, last summer — the summer in between my sophomore and junior years of high school — I discovered the power of the mental game.

"You can't control your performance until you are in control of yourself," sports psychologist Gary Mack wrote in his book, *Mind Gym*. "What you're thinking. How you're feeling. Competition is won or lost on the six-inch playing field between the ears."

In the summer following my sophomore year of high school, I had a batting average of around .450, getting a hit almost half of the time I was at-bat. I was more confident than ever before and knew going into each game how I was going to succeed.

"I believe a champion wins in his mind first, then he plays the game, not the other way around," World Series champion Alex Rodriguez wrote in the foreword of *Mind Gym*. "It's powerful stuff."

Many athletes find that what differentiates their good and bad performances is their mental preparation and strength, instead of their physical ability and performance.

"At some point throughout the course of any game, you're gonna go through some adversity," Monte Vista football coach Craig Bergman said. "You have to overcome the natural ability to get mad, hang your head and be upset. You have to be able to forget those things in order

to succeed."

Sports psychologist Jack Lesyk at the Ohio Center for Sports Psychology believes in nine mental skills that, if put to use, will strongly enhance the amount of success one can achieve in their sport.

These include: choosing and maintaining a positive attitude, maintaining a high level of self-motivation, setting high but realistic goals, dealing effectively with people, using positive self-talk, using positive mental imagery, man-

work and consistent effort pays off, even if it's not immediate.

Mental imagery is more powerful than some people may realize. If someone can mentally depict the action they are going to perform (i.e. making solid contact on a swing, executing a tackle, draining a shot), it has the possibility to help that person to a great degree. Mental imagery can have the power to prepare your brain for action and familiarize success by allowing you to experience it before it happens.

Dealing with anxiety and emotions during a game is the final step in practicing mental strength in sports. An athlete should realize that tension, stress, anger, anxiety and disappointment are all part of any sport. Instead of letting these emotions take control, athletes need to move on, choose to have a realistic attitude about their failure, and work even harder for next time. With managing your attitude, emotions and mentality comes the equalized management of physical skill.

"[Mental and physical training go] hand in hand," Bergman said. "The physical repetition is also the mental repetition. Practicing physical skills on a regular basis is, in fact, repetition for the mind, since those moves are continually being committed to muscle memory. As important as the mental side of the game is, players must also not forget to commit physical skills to muscle memory to create mental familiarity and more time for mental preparation itself."

With a balance of physical and mental preparation, commitment, and a thorough understanding of the mental exercises that an athlete can use to perpetuate success, someone can then achieve the aspiration of many: confidence.

"Success comes from the peace of mind knowing you did your very best on and off the field as a player and a person," Mack wrote. "When you leave the game, how do you want to be remembered? How do you define success?"

I'll leave you with that. Now go out there, and earn it.



ART BY NEHA SEKHON OF THE SPUTNIK

aging anxiety effectively, managing emotions effectively and maintaining concentration.

While these may all be crucial aspects to your mental game, there are a few in particular that need to be expanded on and will do you the most good on the field, court, track, pool — anywhere.

Attitude and effort are the two things someone can control in a game. If an appropriate attitude and a high level of effort are chosen, that person is already setting themselves up to succeed. It's also important to realize that hard