



Heads-Up Baseball

Fundamentals of Heads-Up Baseball:

1. Take responsibility for your thoughts and actions
2. Commit to a mission: know why you play baseball, what character traits you want to possess and what you want to accomplish in the game
3. Make daily actions consistent with your mission
4. Play one pitch at a time, confident and focused on each pitch as it is played with disregard for past and future pitches
5. Focus on the process of playing the game rather than the outcomes of your performance
6. Realize that you can't control what happens around you, but you can control your response to it, and that you must be in control of yourself before you can control your performance
7. Develop your mental skills so you consistently perform near the best of your ability and have "something to go to" when faced with adversity
8. Practice what you are going to do in a game
9. Learn each day
10. Keep it simple

Your mental game responsibilities include:

1. Having a clearly defined "mission." Your mission provides direction, intensity and purpose to your practice sessions and games.
2. Playing the game one pitch at a time. Be as confident and as focused as possible on each pitch as it is thrown

Playing one pitch at a time broken into 3 basic steps:

Step 1: Be in control of Yourself

The first step is getting yourself under control. To be in control of yourself you need to first be aware of what is going on inside you. If you are not in control of yourself, are you able to make adjustments necessary to get where you want to be.

Step 2: have a plan or Purpose on Each Pitch

Once you are in control of yourself, clarify exactly what you want to accomplish on this next pitch. Just as important as having a purpose is making a commitment to your plan.

Step 3: Trust Yourself

The final step to playing one pitch at a time is to trust yourself – to let yourself perform. You're under control; you know what you want to do, now just do it. This is a “freeing” feeling! When you are playing with confidence, you are trusting yourself and letting go of conscious effort.

3. This third responsibility is a tough one. Baseball is so oriented toward outcome statistics that players have difficulty evaluating themselves on how well they “worked the process” by using their pre-performance routines. Focus on the process rather than the outcome. Since the outcome of what you are trying to do (getting a base hit or getting a batter out) is outside your control, you must focus your energies on the process of playing the game rather than on the results of your effort.
4. Develop your mental skills. Along with the physical skills, you need to develop mental skills if you are going to discover just how good a ballplayer you can be. These skills include the deep breath, mental imagery, self-talk, performance routines and daily goal setting. These skills become your “something-to-go-to” when the pressure is on.
5. Make a commitment to learning. Making a commitment to learning as much as you can each day is a vital part of finding out how good you can be.
 - A. Get into the habit of constructively evaluating each of your performances. Mentally replaying your at bats after a game, for example, can turn 4 at bats into 12, making you a more “experienced” player. Even a bad performance can be turned into a positive experience if you take a little time and draw a lesson or two from it.
 - B. Realize the importance of quality practice sessions. You can't expect a skill to simply show up in a game if you haven't practiced it first. If you work on the mental game in practice, you will be able to handle pressure situations in games.

What is a Mission and Why is it Important?

Your answers to the three questions can put your mission in focus:

1. Why do you play baseball?
2. What type of player would you like to be?
3. What would you like to accomplish in baseball?

The first question examines your motivation for playing. The second focuses on the character traits you want to possess, or what you would like your reputation as a ballplayer to be. The third refers to tangible outcomes.

1. Your mission Gives Direction and Defines Discipline

Knowing your mission and keeping it prominent in your mind gives direction to your actions. Most players let their physical feelings dictate how well they play. If they feel good they think that they will play well; when they don't feel good, their performance usually suffers.

Heads-up players, however, are driven by values, a sense of purpose and their mission. Baseball can be a grind and at times you may not feel like making the effort that will take you closer to your dreams. It takes discipline and commitment to work hard every day. If part of your mission is to play hard every day, you have to play hard today!

Discipline and commitment are defined as putting your mission first. You do what your mission “says” you should do rather than what you feel like doing. Committed athletes are driven by their purpose and not by how they happen to feel on a given day.

Clarifying your mission gives you something to go to when you don’t feel like doing what you need to do or some adversity gets in your way. Making decisions is easier for players who have a mission because their priorities are set.

2. Your Mission Provides Meaning

Clarifying your mission keeps you focused on the reason you play baseball and the meaning it has for you. What is the meaning of baseball? The meaning comes from you. You decide what to put into it and what you want out of it. There is a lot of struggle to play the game well, so work to develop some sense that what you are doing makes a difference to you. The more meaning you bring to playing baseball, the more you get out of it

3. Your Mission Minimizes Stress

Many players tie their feelings of self-worth to their performance. It’s easy to fall into this trap when a lot of your time is spent thinking about baseball and much of the attention you receive from other people is related to baseball. When you think your value as a person is on the line each time you go up to bat, you’re going to be nervous. With so much on the line, how could you not feel pressure?

If you decide that you play because you love it and that you are OK regardless of how you perform, you are less likely to feel stress during a game. If you love it, why get upset? The less stress you experience, the better you play. The better you understand the big picture, the more likely you are to free yourself up and play great

4. Your Mission Fuels Intensity

Having a clear sense of being “on a mission” adds “intensity” to your game. When you play present moment to present moment you have an intent, it results in your having intensity. You need to have something to focus on and strive for or you will end up going through the motions. When you have a purpose in mind, you add quality to your performance

What Type of player Do You Want to Be?

This is an important question because it is totally within your control. You can choose to play with pride and see how much you can learn each day. You can’t choose to be the winning pitcher in today’s game because too many things are outside of your control. Remember, spend your time and energy on the things you can control.

Great players have many different traits; no single trait must be held by every player to be successful. Below is a partial list of characteristics that champion athletes in all sports tend to have:

Courage	honesty	dedication	sportsmanship
Fun	unselfishness	enjoyment	mental toughness
Focus	leadership	composure	concentration
Pride	hard work	relentlessness	consistency

Integrity
Confidence

tenacity
commitment

desire to learn
love of the game

respect for the game

What Would You Like To Accomplish In Baseball?

The answers to this question are called outcomes because they are based on the results of your actions rather than how you go about getting them. A clear vision of where you want to end up makes it more likely that you'll get there.

1. **Have a dream.** Players who get the most out of their ability not only have a dream that motivates them, but dream about it reaching it regularly. **What you spend your time thinking about often happens.**
2. **Make your goals specific and measurable.** A goal motivates you to play at a higher level. But it won't help you unless you know if you've reached it or not. Specific goals create clearer images of what you want to accomplish. The more clearly you see a goal being reached, the more likely you are to reach it.
3. **Make your goals difficult but attainable.** Make your goals something you have to stretch for and not easily reached. But don't overdo it. A goal that seems unreachable doesn't motivate and can dampen your spirits instead of exciting them.
4. **State your goals in a positive way.** Your goals should project the outcomes you want to achieve, not those you want to avoid
5. **Adjust your goals when necessary.** Change a goal if you achieve it or it becomes clear you can't reach it

To Accomplish Your Goals: Be Present

We are back to the ingredients necessary for playing good baseball, to the present moment and the process of playing the game. There may be a goal you are trying to reach in the future, but the present is the only place where you have any degree of control. What you accomplish in a season is really the sum of all your present moments, and what you accomplish in your career is really the sum of all your "todays."

YOUR CAREER = TODAY + TODAY + TODAY + TODAY + ...

Your present approach to the game is where to place the emphasis of your mission. Focus more on the "how" than the "what," on the process more than the outcome.

Putting Your Mission into Action on a Daily Basis:

Each day is a mini-career. You can't retire and say you got the most out of your ability if you don't get the most out of it today. If you want to say you're proud of your playing career after you decide to hang them up, make it today's mission to conduct yourself in a way that makes you proud.

A clear mission gives you perspective, direction, intensity, and meaning, and opens the door to your learning as much as possible. In addition, it helps avoid the "Going-Through-The-Motions" mind-set that cripples many players and keeps them from finding out how good they can be. In essence, your mission becomes your attitude. It's a decision you make on a day-to-day basis.

1. Ask yourself before each game or practice, "What is today's mission?" or "What do I want to get out of today?"
2. Keep that mission in mind as you play the game or work through the practice

3. Ask yourself at the end of the day, “How did I do on today’s mission?”

Taking Control

Confidence is the goal of the mental game. If you’re not in control of yourself, you aren’t playing with confidence. With all those thoughts and feelings running wild, you aren’t playing the game one pitch at a time. It’s your responsibility to be in control of yourself. To consistently play at or near your best, you need to understand a few things about self-control that will help develop your ability to control yourself on the field.

There are two fundamental ideas on control which form the foundation for playing baseball one pitch at a time:

1. You can’t control what happens around you, but you can control how you choose to respond
2. You must be in control of yourself before you can control your performance

Control Point No. 1:

Here is a list of “concerns” that you have no control over:

An umpire’s call	field conditions	the crowd	the weather
Your coach	teammate’s performance	luck	opponent’s ability
Condition of the batter’s box	pitch thrown	getting a hit	the defense
Getting a batter out	giving up a hit	a scout in the crowd	

You can do everything right and still “fail.” Energy spent worrying about what is outside of your control takes away from the energy needed to focus on your performance. Baseball is hard enough the way it is. Don’t play it with part of your brain tied behind your back.

One of the great things about being a human being is the ability to think independently of our surrounding. For instance, you can choose at any time to recall your greatest pitches or best hits. Do this for a few minutes and you’ll start to feel pretty good. Our minds don’t do a good job of differentiating between what is real and what is imagined, so seeing yourself succeeding over and over is a good thing.

The best players spend a lot of time thinking about playing well. In fact, choosing to think about playing well plays a part in these players’ success. They play great largely because they think about playing great. Allowing yourself to feel down or upset during adversity and only feel confident when everything is going your way puts you on an emotional roller coaster. You can’t afford that kind of ride if you want to be the best ballplayer you can!

Keeps your thoughts positive in the face of failure is difficult. Negative reactions to bad things are natural so more likely it’s become a habit and changing a habit is tough. Developing a new habit takes time and repetition – mindful repetition, not just going through the motions. Make effective thinking a habit so that your thoughts naturally become proactive, confident and performance enhancing.

Control Point No. 2:

When you are “in control of yourself” you are composed, thinking clearly and confidently, and aware of what is happening both inside and outside of you. Your movements are fluid and you feel centered and balanced. Self-control goes hand-in-hand with confidence. Having control of yourself means that you

remove obstacles such as tension, doubt, and fear about what might happen in the future. Only then are you “free” to trust yourself and allow your natural abilities and skills to shine through. Developing the ability to control yourself in the heat of battle is an essential component of playing heads-up baseball. When you are in control, all other aspects of playing well, such as making good decisions and using your best mechanics, become easier. The player who is under control is playing one pitch at a time. He’s not upset about something that happened on a previous pitch or worried about what might happen on a future pitch. His focus is on the present pitch. That’s where he has control.

A Slow, Steady Breath: The Mental Game’s Most Versatile Skill

One of the easiest yet most powerful skills to help gain and keep self-control is a deep breath. Stopping to take a slow, steady breath serves a number of purposes, and many players find it to be the most helpful mental game skill they learn.

A Good Breath:

1. Puts your focus on the present moment
2. Enables you to “check in” with yourself to see if you are in control
3. Helps you get control
4. Helps release negatives
5. Energizes you when you are feeling sluggish
6. Helps you shift from conscious thinking to “unconscious” trusting
7. Helps establish a sense of rhythm in your pitching, hitting or fielding

Playing The Game One Pitch at a Time

The process consists of three basic steps:

1. Self-control
2. Plan your performance
3. Trust yourself

~ **Step 1/ Self-Control:** Turn your focus inward and check in to see what’s going on. Are you where you want to be mentally and physically? If so, start planning your performance. If you aren’t where you want to be, use your mental skills to make adjustments. If you are too tense, you need to release the tension. If you are too relaxed or “flat,” pick yourself up.

Checking in on yourself gives you “awareness.” Awareness is like getting feedback from your coach on what, if any, adjustments are necessary to improve your performance. The best players excel at coaching themselves. Rather than rely on their coach, they recognize when adjustments are needed and what adjustments to make.

To help you understand awareness, think of a traffic light inside your body. The traffic light tells you what to do:

Green: When you are playing well, your traffic light is green You’re just doing it; you’re in the flow or “the zone,” and you’ve got rhythm. Cruise right on through any “intersections” you encounter.

Yellow: Your yellow light starts to come on when you start to have trouble. Swinging at a bad pitch, giving up a base hit or seeing your girlfriend in the stands with another guy can throw you slightly off your game. You’re a little tense, you’re not quite focused or you’re rushing.

Red: You're really struggling when you hit your red light. Maybe you walked two batters, made an error or had the coach yell at you. Your mind is racing. You're tense and shaken and looking forward to the end of the inning or game.

The green-to-yellow-to-red progression is similar to "spiraling out of control." Learn to recognize when you have a green light and when you don't. Regaining control isn't difficult at the yellow light stage, but when you hit a red light, it becomes much tougher. Unfortunately, when players sense a yellow light they react the same way most drivers would – they speed up to get through it. This also is a common response to a stressful situation. Players (and coaches) perceive the game going faster and faster, so they go faster and faster to keep up which leads to trouble.

Green Light Examples:

- I get a green light when:
 - I prepare myself mentally for the game
 - I have a good at bat
 - I get a good batter out
 - I use my routine
- When I have a green light, I feel:
 - Energized, excited, calm, relaxed
 - Totally focused on the baseball
 - The target I'm throwing to looks big and close
- When I have a green light, I say to myself:
 - Nothing
 - "I'm unstoppable"
 - "Hit the ball to me"

Yellow Light Examples:

- I get a yellow light when:
 - I can't commit to my plan
 - I swing at a bad pitch
 - The umpire blows a call
 - I make an error
- When I have a yellow light, I feel:
 - The game speeds up, I think of a million things
 - Tightness in my shoulders and the backs of my legs
 - I start to try harder
 - Upset
- When I have a yellow light, I say to myself:
 - "I'm losing it"
 - "Here we go again"
 - "Why does this always happen to me?"

Red Light Examples:

- I get a red light when:
 - I have two yellow lights in a row
 - I'm 0 for my last 6 at bats

- I give up a home run
- I make a stupid error
- When I have a red light, I feel:
 - My jaw clench tightly
 - Enraged
 - Like quitting
 - Myself throw my equipment
- When I have a red light, I say to myself”
 - %(*#@&>*<!!!
 - “Why do I play this stupid game?”
 - “I’m a loser”

Now you know when and where to look for signals that tell you whether you need to make adjustments to get yourself under control. Make it a habit to look for them during practice so you’ll be able to spot them during games.

Skills For Gaining Control:

1. **Recognizing You Aren’t in Control:** Recognizing you aren’t in control of yourself and that you’re not relaxed and focused is often enough to get you back to where you want to be. Watch for “intersections” in the game where a yellow light could pop up
2. **Use Your Breath:** Taking a breath is a powerful tool for gaining control. Take a good breath right now; relax your body as you exhale. Where were you tense? That’s the first place to look when you have a yellow light in a game.
3. **Take Some Time:** Time can be one of your best friends. A great thing about baseball is that you can take a short walk, tie your shoe laces, or whatever between pitches to help you get settled down.
4. **Use a Release:** Develop a routine or gesture to symbolically “release” or let go of negative thoughts and feelings
 - a. Pick up dirt, squeeze it (put your anger into it), throw it away
 - b. Undo your batting gloves to release a bad swing, then tighten them up
 - c. Pitchers can wipe dirt from the rubber to “wipe away your anger.”
 - d. Hitters can smooth out the batter’s box when something frustrates them
 - e. Infielders can smooth out their spot
5. **Pick a Focal Point:** Many players pick a focal point in the ballpark before a game begins that helps them gain control. It could be a sign, a flag, or a place on the fence. Make it something that reminds you of all the work you’ve put in to get where you are today. When you look at it during the game, it reminds you that you have paid your dues and you’re ready to play.
6. **Carry Yourself to Confidence:** A simple and effective way to regain control is to carry yourself as if you were extremely confident and in control. Thinking confident thoughts makes you feel confident; carrying yourself in a confident way does the same thing.

To Carry yourself more like a heads-up player, try the following:

1. Keep your head up
2. Lift your sternum (chest bone)
3. Act like the most confident player you know
4. Think about your greatest performance and carry yourself the way you did that day
5. Create space between your pelvis and rib cage

~ **Step 2 / Plan Your Performance:** This means deciding what you are going to do. If you are a pitcher, it may mean throwing a fastball low and away. If you're a hitter, it may mean looking for a pitch on the outside half and going the other way. When you have made your plan, make a commitment to your decision and put your focus on the task at hand.

COMMIT TO THE PLAN YOU DECIDE ON!!!

Visualize the plan:

Seeing yourself executing your plan before the pitch is thrown strengthens your commitment and sharpens your concentration. If you can, see it happen in your mind, then do it for real. Visualizing just before the pitch helps “block out” all other distractions. A distraction is blocked out indirectly by focusing so intently on something else that the distraction is pushed out of your awareness. The key is to figure out what you should pay attention to and get really good at focusing on it.

Once you have yourself under control, decide on a clear and simple plan for what you are going to do on the next pitch. Commit to that plan and get focused by seeing yourself do it (all of which is done in a matter of seconds).

~ **Step 3 / Trust:** Finally, you perform. Trust yourself. Trust your preparation and just do it. Turn control over to your body and let it go. Trust is confidence in action.

When they're at their best, most players say their minds are clear. Thinking too much is a big problem. Shifting from deciding on your plan between pitches to a trusting or “not-thinking” mind-set allows you to play well during each pitch.

1. **The Breath:** The breath often is effective in getting into your trusting mind-set. When you “think too much” your focus is inside on what you are thinking. When a pitch is thrown, regardless of whether you are throwing it, trying to hit it, preparing to catch it or looking to advance to the next base, you need to focus on the target. As you exhale, send your focus toward the target like a spotlight sending out a narrow beam of light.
2. **Visualization:** Seeing between pitches what you want to do helps your concentration and clicks you in to a trusting mind-set. Focus on the image of the ball being hit to you, your pitch hitting its target or a line drive whistling past the pitcher's ear to “block out” unwanted thoughts. The process of playing each pitch simply becomes: **See It, Do It.**
3. **Cue Words:** Although the goal is to think about nothing, realistically that doesn't happen too often. The closest thing to nothing is one. Remember this when you find yourself thinking too much. Instead of random thoughts, choose one word or a short phrase that directs your focus and instructs your actions. Say the word or words to yourself just before a pitch is thrown.

Examples include: “quick hands”, “lower half”, “head down”, “hands in”

Effective “cue words” capture what you are trying to accomplish and help you stay focused. Repeating these words before each pitch will help you shift from thinking to trusting and give you a chance to get to where you want to be

4. **Performance-Related Triggers:** Use objects or pieces of equipment to trigger your focus.

Pitchers can use the rubber as a “trigger” to shift into a trusting mind-set. Stepping on the rubber means you are ready for this pitch. Your focus is right here, right now. Don’t step onto the rubber until you have a green light.

Hitters can use the batter’s box in the same way. When you step into the box you’re ready. Your focus is on the pitcher and the baseball. If you have a yellow or red light, take as much time as you are allowed. When you step in the box you are focused and ready for this pitch.

Fielders can use an imaginary “circle of focus.” As the pitcher is about to begin his delivery, take two steps forward into your “circle of focus.” In that circle you are ready to focus on the baseball or the area over home plate from where the ball may come to you. If the ball isn’t hit to you, step back, relax and repeat the process on the next pitch. Try pounding your glove once or twice in the circle to trigger your focus on the plate.

The key is doing something that puts your focus outside of you. When you play well you trust your ability. Your focus isn’t on you or your mechanics but on the ball or your target.

You’ve got to **TRUST WHAT YOU’VE GOT** and focus on what is working for you because that’s what you can control. Instead of focusing on what is not working, focus on what is. Maybe you feel tired, your mechanics feel uncomfortable or your hands seem slow and you’re only at about 70 percent. Focus on the 70 percent you **do** have, not the 30 percent you don’t.