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America's Pastime?

“Why do you like this game” said my friend as he turned in his chair to face me wanting me to change the channel from the Twins game to anything else. “This is like watching paint dry” he said as they stand there waiting for the next pitch seemingly doing nothing at all. However, what excites me and made me fall in love with the game of baseball is what you don’t see going on between each pitch and during every play. My little league coach once told me “The game of baseball is a lot like chess, the amount of thinking required to know what to do if you get the ball or even where to go if you don’t get it is what makes this game so special.” “How did he drop that” “why can’t he hit the ball” “if they put me out there, I would have made that play” were just a few of the things I heard from my fellow fans as I was sitting at Target Field enjoying a baseball game. Something I have learned as I continue to play baseball is that nothing is guaranteed, just because you do something right doesn’t mean you will get the best outcome. “You don’t belong here; my son is a great pitcher and you’re just making him look bad.” yelled a parent to me while I was trying my hardest to block the eighth fastball he spiked into the ground this inning. As a catcher not many people know the struggle of having to make everyone else look good and doing your best to keep the ball in front of you. “It can’t hurt that bad he’s just being a baby” I heard after just watching a batter get hit in the ribs by a fastball that was thrown 101 mph, it later came out that he had three broken ribs because of that hit but in the moment the people believed that he was just faking and he was being a “baby”. I don’t think

someone in the stands should be criticizing a player when they have no Idea how a hit felt or how bad it was just by looking at it.

“Is the game over yet? I want to go home.” I said to my mom when I was just 6 years old sitting down the third base line. “Jordan, it’s only the third inning; there are still six more innings” she said in response to my complaining. However, as I got older and began to play the sport, I came to realize how intense and exciting it really is; behind all the “standing around” it’s a beautiful and interesting sport that I believe deserves more love than it gets. The majority of baseball is mental, thinking of where I have to throw the ball if it comes to me or even thinking of where I have to move if the ball doesn’t come to me before every pitch. There are millions of outcomes for ever play that happens during a baseball game. As a catcher, I experience this firsthand, I have to know what I have to do with the ball when I get it, and I have to know what everyone else needs to do and let them know before and during the play. The game may be boring to some people, but I think if they look deeper into the game, They may change their minds.

Another thing I hear all the time is, “How did he miss that” or “I could have made that play” and even “all you u have to do is hit a ball with a stick” these are just a few of the things I have heard when I talk to other fans or people I meet about baseball. It has become a common stereotype that the game of baseball is mindless and easy to play, and that anyone can pick up a bat and hit a pitch off of a MLB or even college pitcher because, “all you have to do is make contact” said someone I had been friends with that had never played the game. If only it were that simple that all I have to do is make contact with the ball, but even if I do manage to make

contact with a ball that is nine inches around with a bat that has a barrel that is two inches around, it doesn't mean I will get a hit. There are nine other people trying their best to get me out, so in reality it's not just me against the pitcher it is nine versus one every time I step up to the plate. The most stressful thing in baseball is when there are two outs in the last inning of a close game and I'm up to bat because it's just me against all the players in the field. There is also the mental side of baseball, knowing what I have to do before every pitch whether I'm in the field or batting. There is a quote that I feel does a good job explaining the difficulty of playing baseball, it comes from hall of fame catcher Yogi Berra who once said, "Baseball is ninety percent mental, and the other half is physical" this is one of the most iconic quotes in baseball because of how well he described the amount of effort put into each play, saying that you have to put in 140% to be able to succeed in this sport that a lot of people don't appreciate.

"You don't belong on that field" this is a comment I have heard from a few different parents while I was trying my best to catch because I was the only player on the team that knew how to play the position. "What are you doing! You have to be able to stop those, or you won't make it in this game," said my coach who I had been playing for the last couple of years. He was yelling at me for not being able to keep a ball Infront of me that was four feet to my left behind the batter, but as a catcher you have to take the responsibility for every play that there is a miscommunication or a bad pitch because you are the leader and as the leader you have to let everyone know what to do before every pitch and shoulder the blame when something goes wrong. That is something not many people can see because they are so focused on the pitcher and the player at the plate, no one notices the player behind the plate talking to the umpire and encouraging their pitcher and their fielders all from one spot. Another struggle that is faced by all catchers is the weather; I have played in games where there was rain pouring down creating

puddles and turning the dirt to mud at my feet. I have also played in games where the scorching heat mixed with the heavy gear causes you to sweat more than you thought possible, one example was my freshman year of high school we were playing against Andover and we had the sun beating down on us in 100-degree heat with no shade in sight, but I still put on my shin guards, helmet, and chest protector and went out onto the field to catch because I couldn't let my team down by refusing to catch.

Other things I've heard at games are "Walk it off, it couldn't hurt that bad" and "There's no crying in baseball" also "Just rub some dirt in It you'll be fine" these are some common sayings in baseball because it's hard to know how much something hurt when the person it happened to doesn't show much emotion afterwards. Baseball players are some of the toughest athletes in all of sports not just physically but mentally as well, constantly being told to "Walk it off" when they get hit by a fastball that was thrown 100mph and having to run the bases after taking a few seconds to deal with the pain. While I was playing fall ball with my friends, I was the catcher for our team and I Caught every inning of every game because we didn't have a backup, but in our eighth game I got hit by a foul ball that was coming at me at about 75mph, so I took a few seconds to collect myself and then went back out to catch. I continued catching for the next six innings until finally in the seventh inning I couldn't take it any more every pitch that I caught felt like I was being stabbed by hundreds of tiny knives, and my wrist was burning so I told my coach I had to stop. I went from the field to a nearby hospital where they took an x-ray and found that because of that foul ball that hit me I had broken a bone in my wrist and had to have a cast for 6 weeks and physical therapy afterwards. I kept going through those six innings not because I was feeling better but because I didn't want to let my team down, my team's success was more important to me than the pain I felt so I fought through a broken bone to help

them. This is the case for many baseball players; they put the success of the team above their own health and fight through pain to give their team the best chance of winning.

If you ever find yourself watching a baseball game and thinking “how could a professional sport be so boring” just think about the things going on beneath the surface of every play and the beauty of a good play being made. Or if someone says “I would have made that play” they might have, but nobody makes every play every time the ball is hit their way. Or Someone is talking about the hardest position on the field and don’t include catcher because all they do is “catch a ball and throw it back to the pitcher” you could try to show them the difficulty of the position and the lack of recognition that catchers receive. And if you see a player, get hit with a ball and hear someone say “Just Walk it off” just know there is nothing they want more than to walk it off and continue helping their team succeed. All these experiences and comments have stuck with me and helped me stick with sports even if it's hard and to block out the people that doubt me.