

Respect the Game ~ 10 Rules

1

Play by the Rules- This seems simple enough, but for some, rules are made to be broken. Few sports have as many rules as baseball. Ever since Baseball was invented, players have always tried to bend and break the rules. In professional baseball, rule breakers include hitters who cork their bats and pitchers who put foreign substances on the baseball. In little league, they are the players who lie about their age or coaches who allow their pitchers to throw more innings than is allowed in a week. Baseball players break the rules all the time and many end up winning because of their deception. They don't realize, however, that the loser is the Game itself. By not abiding by the written rules of Baseball, players intentionally disrespect the people who wrote the rules and the players throughout history who followed them religiously. For players who follow the rules, winning is sweeter and losing becomes more instructive.

2

Listen to Your Coach- I love when a player says he is a "student of the game" because I consider myself to be one also. I have played baseball as a youth and as an adult, I have read many books on the Game and I have watched hundreds of games, but the best lessons I have learned have come from the many great coaches I have had the privilege to play for. Like a parent or a grandparent, coaches have baseball knowledge and wisdom that is invaluable to the players who choose to listen. Players should listen to coaches when they are teaching one of the dozens of specialized skills needed to play this complex game. They should listen when coaches review the countless number of situations that are likely to occur in a typical game. Players should especially listen to coaches who teach players and teams how to win and lose like champions. Any player who thinks he knows all there is to know about baseball lacks the respect that is necessary to excel at a game that can never be perfected. Listening to coaches provides all players with a valuable education that is free of charge.

3

Run Everything Out- We have all heard the same baseball clichés: "Baseball is a game of inches", or "It's not over until the Fat Lady sings." Baseball is an unpredictable game and for this reason, players should never, ever, assume the outcome of a play. Even Gold Glove professional baseball players drop routine fly balls or let easy grounders trickle through their legs. These errors are usually pretty embarrassing, but not as embarrassing as the hitter who assumes the ball will be caught and jogs to first base. By running everything out, hitters not only have a chance to reach base safely, they also have a chance to take an extra base because other fielders often drop their guards when they see a play that should be made easily. Baseball is a game of starts and stops. When the play starts, good players always run hard until the play is over. Just remember, when in doubt, run it out!

4

Take Care of Your Equipment- What does taking care of baseball equipment have to do with respecting the game of baseball? Plenty. First, baseball equipment can be very expensive. Unfortunately, baseball has become a sport that some underprivileged players are unable to play due to the high cost of the basic equipment needed to play the game. Young players often take for granted how fortunate they are to be able to use the new, high-tech equipment that enables them to play at a higher level than ever before. In the early days of Baseball, players would use whatever materials they could find to make balls, bats, gloves and protective equipment. Now, we have balls that are consistently manufactured, bats that are made out of the lightest and most powerful materials, special gloves for all positions and preferences, and protective equipment that helps keep players safe from serious injury. Respecting the Game means taking care of this valuable equipment. When a player throws a helmet, bat, or glove in anger, the game of Baseball suffers as much as the equipment. There is no place in the Game for unsportsmanlike behavior that often results in damaged equipment.

5

Don't Argue With Umpires- Why? Two good reasons--umpires rarely change their calls and they are human. Everyone is entertained when the manager of a Major League team roars out of the dugout to argue with an umpire. After many colorful words, dirt kicking, gum or tobacco spitting, and equipment throwing, the call rarely changes. Major League managers often argue with umpires knowing the call won't change, but they do it anyway to show support for their players. Some would say that arguing with umpires is part of the game. That may be true at the professional level, but there is no place for arguing with umpires in youth baseball. Coaches and parents who argue with umpires set a poor example for young people who are very impressionable. Show me a young player who argues with umpires and I'll show you a coach or a parent who has exhibited the same behavior in front of this player. Umpires are not only adults who should command the respect of children; they are also humans who will fail at times. Just as players will make mental mistakes during a game, so will umpires. I have yet to see an umpire yell at a player who missed a sign or threw to the wrong base. In the event an umpire makes an obvious mistake in a youth baseball game, the coach and only the coach should approach the umpire in a respectful manner to understand why the call was made. After a brief discussion and a final ruling by the umpire, the coaches, players and spectators should accept the call and move on with the game.

6

Hustle On and Off the Field- This is a simple one. The game of Baseball can seem slow enough without players walking on and off the field between innings. This may seem very unscientific, but I believe a team that runs full speed out to their defensive positions or into the dugout after the third out is made, usually enjoys a big advantage over an opposing team that does not. That advantage is unity. Being a team means all nine players acting as one. Good defense in baseball means nine players working together every time the ball is in play. When everyone sprints out to their positions, it sets the tone for a good defensive inning as one cohesive unit. When everyone sprints to the dugout after the third out is made, it will appear to the opposing team that each player coming off the field is expecting to bat that inning. On the flip side, players who walk out to their positions or take their time coming in to hit, appear to the opposition as disinterested and they often are. These players are also not showing respect for their teammates who are hustling on and off the field or their coaches who may only have a short period of time between innings to give instructions or to make adjustments. It's simple---just hustle.

7

Put Team Goals First- I was listening to an interview recently with a young Major League ballplayer who was asked by a reporter how many home runs he thought he could hit during the upcoming season. The player responded by saying that making any predictions would show a "lack of respect" for the game of Baseball. This young player was exhibiting wisdom beyond his baseball years. How refreshing it was to hear a player who was less concerned about his personal achievements and more interested in the success of the team. Baseball games are filled with contributions from every player that will collectively determine the outcome of the game. The young professional player who was interviewed must know that in a team sport, individual performance is secondary. Players should win or lose as a team, never as an individual.

8

Pick up Your Teammates- Why would anyone want to play a game where failure is so common? Think about it. Hitting safely 3 times out of 10 makes you one of the best players on the team. Pitchers will typically give up several hits and runs each game. Catchers usually throw out less than half the base runners attempting to steal. With all of this failure, players will surely need a teammate or a coach to encourage them at some point during a game. Encouragement and support can range from a brief conversation to make sure the player's head is in the game and not on the recent failure to a few comforting words mixed in with some "baseball chatter". Baseball chatter is the art of constantly talking to your own player. As an example, after a player strikes out, some of the sting of this failure is taken away when the batter hears his teammates saying simple words like, "Get him next time, kid". Or, while a pitcher is on the mound, constant words of encouragement not only serve to bolster his confidence, it also keeps players on the field focused on the action. A team that is constantly engaging in some form of positive baseball chatter directed at teammates will win more games and have more fun than a team that is negative or silent.

Wear Your Uniform Properly- A wise coach once told me, “If you look good, you play good”. This coach was also known to devote an entire practice to the history of the baseball uniform and how to properly wear one. He truly believed that out of respect for the Game, his players should wear their uniforms properly, which meant shirts tucked in completely, socks that covered the entire exposed leg, hats on perfectly straight and spikes that were always clean before a game. He would always ask his players if they would ever wear ripped jeans and a dirty t-shirt to church. The point he was trying to make was that out of respect for tradition, all baseball players, from the little leaguer to the major leaguer should feel a sense of honor and respect to wear a baseball uniform and they should always wear it the right way. All that being said, baseball players are known to be among the most superstitious athletes in the world, so some exceptions need to be made. For instance, if a player is in the middle of a hitting streak or if a pitcher is on a winning streak it may be excusable to bend Baseball’s fashion rules. In these cases, allowances can be made for a dirtier than normal uniform or socks that look like they have never been washed---that’s baseball!

Leave It All On The Field- When baseball players cross the white lines or step into the batter’s box, they should be prepared to play the game with as much effort as possible. The difference between making a great play in the field or coming up with that clutch hit often is just a matter of wanting to be successful. If a player puts out the maximum effort on every pitch, good things usually happen. Rarely, will a good coach ever criticize a player for making a physical error in the field or at the plate if it looked like that player was expending the maximum effort to be successful. A player who works hard on every play sends a clear message to teammates and coaches. That message is every play is important. Nine players working hard together defensively or hitters and base runners hustling on the base paths will result in baseball as it was intended to be played. Win or lose, players who play hard show respect for their teammates and the game of Baseball. Another coach I have been fortunate to learn from has another definition for “Leaving it all on the field” This wise coach frequently reminds his players that “baseball is a game of second chances” He tells them to leave the error on the field or the strikeout in the batter’s box because there will always another ball to be caught, another opportunity to hit, or another game to be won. Like life, baseball will reward those who learn from their mistakes, and those who work hard to improve. So, leave it on the field—all of it!

The various ways to respect the game of baseball extends far beyond the ten on this list. Baseball is a game that is rich in tradition and it is this tradition that bonds baseball players from one generation to the next. Respecting the game of baseball from the way players look to the way they play are ways of honoring those players and coaches who have gone before us. **Please, Respect the Game !**