

## There's a Lot of Positives in Using Positive Imagery.

Like I said in the previous article, games are lost on errors more than won on hits. The mind is a powerful thing. You can be a half full or half empty thinker, a give me the ball type or please don't hit it to me type. As a coach, you need to determine what type each one of your players resembles. If you are recruiting for a college team or Gold team, you might want to go after those kids that you know are rock steady mentally. Sometimes they make better players than the high school "stars." You want those that are very coachable and want to run through the wall for the team. A coach can tell a lot by talking to the player, watching their body language and watching their eyes. A lot of times, you can tell the intensity of the player they are by looking into their eyes. You can also tell if they are scared/nervous, mentally tough, or they just do not care about anything just by looking into their eyes.

With that said, can you create the type of player that you want on your team? I believe that you can. When you think of how many teams there are around the country, your chance to get a large number of the prime players may not be there. When I coached at STLCC/Meramec, we had 5 1/2 partial scholarships from the school. We normally carried 17+ players so we had to do a lot of creative recruiting along with fundraising. No one on the team had a full ride not even the three players from the Netherlands, or the one from Germany, nor the eleven from Canada. We had to sell the players on the program and on what we wanted to accomplish and had already accomplished in the past. Just as you can tell what kind of a player they are by their body language and eyes, they can tell what kind of a coach you are by yours. They can tell if you are sold on what you are doing with your own program, how enthusiastic and how passionate you are about what you are doing and accomplishing.

So, suppose you have a team of really nice kids that may lack some skill but have a lot of heart. You already know that it takes a lot of teaching the fundamentals, positive encouragement when they make mistakes and a lot of repetitive hitting of ground/fly ball and time hitting/bunting the ball for them to be successful. The icing on the cake is positive imagery. If you, as a coach, have slacked off and did not have quality practices and did not teach them the game then this probably won't make them into a great team. But, if you have had quality practices and you are very positive and encouraging with them, this technique could put you over the edge of greatness.

In 1985, we had a solid team that was better than some but not as good as others. We had some hard nosed kids on that team and others who bought into what we were trying to do. Practices are always tough but short and to the point with no one ever standing around. Everyone is working on something. It was time to start playing games and we had a shortstop who was in the middle of a meltdown during the first half of the season. We were good and we were winning our fair share but we could tell that we needed to do something to get us to the National Tournament again. The shortstop has 22 errors in the first half of the season. Not too good for a main position player. It wasn't her skill level but her concentration and mental toughness.

We started positive imagery and did it most days at practice and always before every game. The players were asked to do it at night before they went to bed. You could see the shortstop going through the steps to herself in between innings and before a lot of the pitches. You could watch her actions and see her lips move and you knew that's what she was doing. That shortstop made one error the rest of the season; we won the conference, the region, and were second at the National Tournament. The shortstop was chosen for the All-Tournament Team at Nationals and also named to the All American Team.

Here's how to do it:

The team sits/lies just like we do for our relaxation talks with their eyes shut.

A coach talks the players through each skill and repeats it as many times as she/he deems necessary.

The coach will start with any skill and say *"picture yourself up at the plate, see the pitcher, look the pitcher square in the eyes as you get into the box. Your eyes should not be wimpy - they should have a lot of confidence in them. Look for the fear in other player's eyes."* The coach should do the same thing with the eyes when on defense.

Then the coach starts with *"See the ball coming to the inside of the plate, it looks like a beach ball, see yourself*

*pulling the ball hard down the line. See the ball coming inside again; see yourself hitting a smash down the line. See the ball coming in to the outside part of the plate; see yourself taking the ball to the opposite field. See the ball coming down the middle and watch the ball go back up the middle for a base hit."*

**Repeat each of these a couple of times.** Make sure that the vocal quest has the player doing everything perfectly and even doing things that you know all of the players cannot do. For example, maybe all players cannot steal a base but go through it anyway, it will still up their level of play. Using this type of system, go through all of the skills used during a game. For example:

See yourself bunting and being on the run when you bunt. See yourself holding the bat correctly for bunting for a base hit (they should know what you mean since you have taught them the correct ways of bunting for a base hit). See yourself running as you bunt, see the ball drop down the line (go over both sidelines.) See yourself being very aggressive and forceful.

Feel yourself running to first base after the hit or bunt (use for both.) Feel the air going through your helmet, feel yourself running faster and faster, pumping your arms, pump, pump, pump, and beating the throw to first-safe.

Feel yourself running to first and being waved on to second, you make the turn and still feel yourself running like the wind, faster and faster doing a headfirst avoidance slide into second - you are safe.

See yourself on defense. See yourself at your position. See the ball coming to your right, you go over, get in good fielding position, field and throw a strike - runner is out.

Go over every type of play that may happen at their position: grounders, line drives, bloopers, throws, dives, etc. Go over every type of throw that they could make. Go over them running and running for a long distance and finally they reach out and catch the ball. Then go over them running the bases, sliding, diving for balls on defense, climbing the outfield or sideline fences to catch a ball, flipping the ball behind their back to a base, throwing a strike from the outfield to get a player at the plate. Cover everything that you can think of a player doing during the game. Picture winning the game and winning the championship.

This will work if they are dedicated in doing it at home as well as with the team. Try it and I think you will see what a difference it makes in your players. They will have a lot more confidence and be a lot more dominant. *Mental toughness is at least 90% of the game.*

**Good Luck!**

**Look for Cheleste's article next month.**