

A “Goldilocks” Approach to Mental Leveling in Baseball

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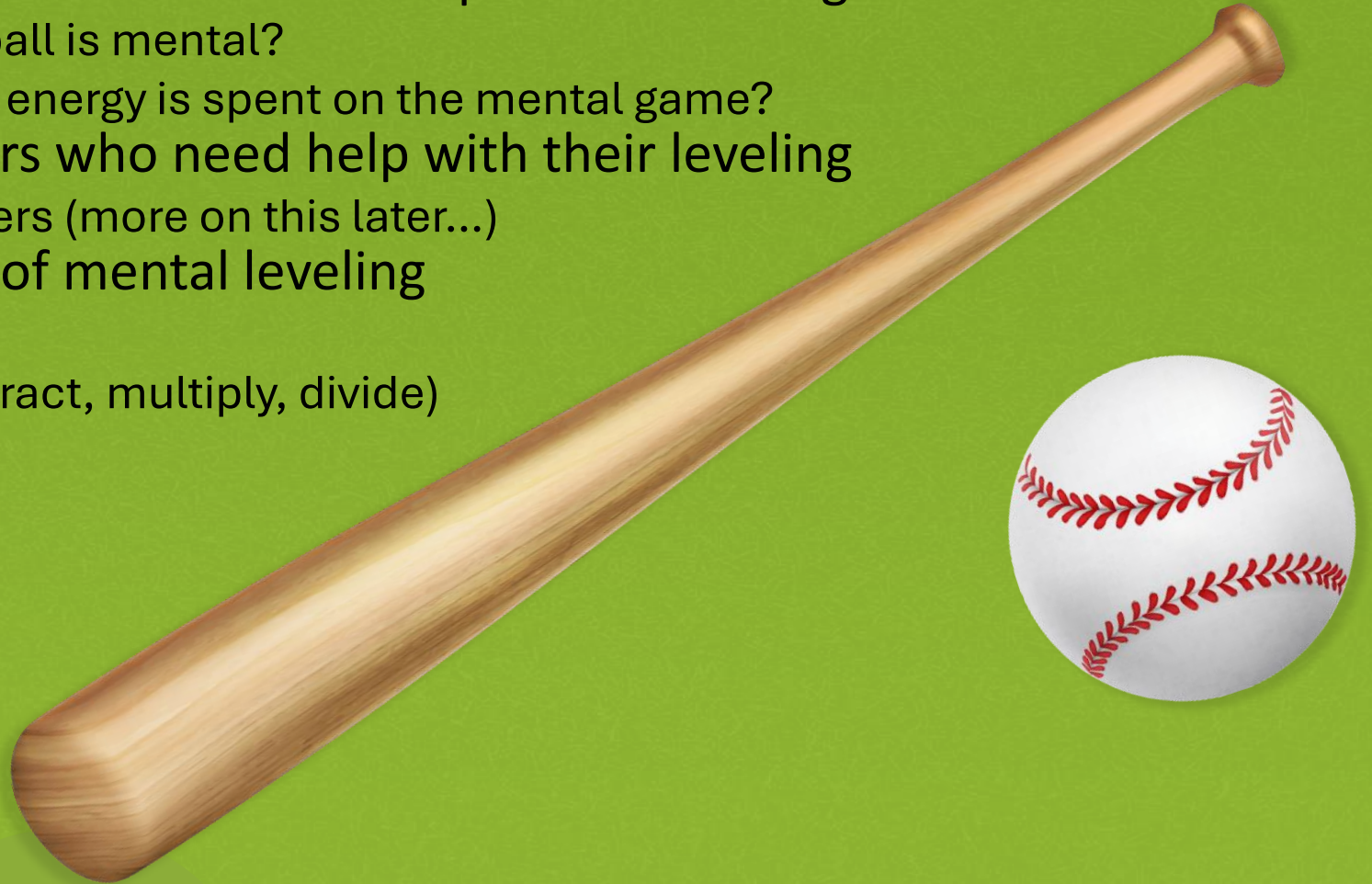
A Brief History of This Talk...

- 2008 (?) high school super bowl
- John Wooden book...
 - “Be quick, but don’t hurry!”
- Conversations with my assistants...
- Sorry for the accent...(Masshole)



Takeaways... (I hope)

- Spend some time thinking about an underrated aspect of coaching baseball
 - What percent of winning baseball is mental?
 - What percent of your coaching energy is spent on the mental game?
- Be better able to identify players who need help with their leveling
 - Especially the “level four” players (more on this later...)
- Further discussion of the topic of mental leveling
 - More/better examples?
 - Do “coaching math” (add, subtract, multiply, divide)



A photograph of a brown leather baseball glove with a white baseball resting inside it, set against a green grassy field. The image is partially obscured by a green circular graphic element.

The key premise:

If you want to play your best baseball,
you don't want to be too "jacked up"
NOR "too loose"; instead, you want
to be JUST RIGHT!

If we imagine four "levels" of intensity,
we want to be on "Level Three"!

**XAVERIAN BASEBALL
 PROPER MENTAL "LEVELING" IN PLAYING THE GAME PROPERLY
 THE GOAL: BE AT LEVEL THREE (NOT FOUR!!!)**

CATEGORY	LEVEL ONE	LEVEL TWO	LEVEL THREE	LEVEL FOUR
Speed of Executing a Play	Slow	Go through the motions	Be quick	Hurry!!
Intensity of Play	Lackadaisical	"Conditionally" focused	Focus at each pitch	Try to do it all/too much
View of Opponents	They don't belong on the field with us	Assume what's "on paper" or assume "the previous"	Respect	Fear
Baserunning Mindset	Inattentive	Conservative	Aggressive	Reckless
"Chirping"	Quiet	Sporadic noise	Every pitch: loud, but for OUR team	Riding the opposing players/team/umpire
After a Mistake or Lack of Execution by a TEAMMATE...	Who cares?	Assign blame to the teammate	Mentally ready to pick up your teammate	I MUST pick up my teammate (it's all up to me)
In a Big Moment...	It doesn't matter	The success level is random, like any other moment	My preparation level maximizes my confidence	The pressure paralyzes your "flow"
Clearly Blown Call by an Umpire	Total indifference	Ignore it, move on	Make your point (quietly), then move on	Rage to the point of distraction
Hitters Ahead in the Count	Hope for a walk	Same approach as being even in the count	Hunting pitches; be ready to RIP!	Take a mindless hack, trying to hit a HR
Hitters' 2-Strike Approach	Give up on the at-bat	Same approach as 0 strikes or 1 strike	Disciplined focus, "mentally athletic"	Excess thought/worry which overloads the brain/body
Pitchers' Mindset	Throw & hope	Nibble; fearful of contact	Attack the strike zone, but disrupt timing	Fire every pitch at 102%
Defensive Mindset	Hope it doesn't get hit to you	Play very carefully, hoping not to screw up.	Want the ball, trust your training, make the play	Field balls that aren't yours; play "on tilt"

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CATEGORY	LEVEL ONE	LEVEL TWO	LEVEL THREE	LEVEL FOUR
Anticipation	No readiness; surprised by plays; "flatfooted"	What's happened before will happen again; "assume"	Each play is different; trust your fundamentals; "frosty"	Predetermined certainty of proper play; "rigid"
Pitching through adversity	Poor body language, sulking	No change, numb	Process your emotions, refocus	Mind racing, panic
Catchers receiving	Lazy, I'll just catch it	Athletic, but unthinking	Strategic with framing, talkative, alert to runners	Frame everything, beg for calls, throw the ball around
Defense between pitches with runners on base	Zone out, wait for the next pitch	Attentive, limited movement or talk	Moving, thinking, talking to teammates	Hyper-focussed on runners, distracted
Pitcher with runners on base	Unawareness; ignore them	Look but don't throw, repetitive mechanics	Working with fielders, changing tempo and looks	Obsessed with runner, forgetting the hitter
Receiving coaching	Ignore, then dismiss	Listen, consider it	Be curious, ask questions, try it	Overreact, coach is picking on me
Give coaching	Hands off, I'm just here to get paid	Present, cheerleading	Engaged, invested, teaching	Overly critical, unapproachable, miserable
Questionable Strike Zone (Hitters & Pitcher)	Complain, sulk	Disagree, make no adjustment	Learn and adjust	Argue with the umpire, make a scene

Regarding “Level One” Guys...

- I’m spending next to zero time on these guys.
- These are the guys you normally cut.
- One exception...the uber-talented ‘level one’ player...the “coach killer”
 - acknowledge the issue
 - meet to address your concerns
 - use teammates/friends to try to motivate
 - offer the player a choice
 - if they’re “in”, they’re in at ‘level three’
 - if they’re not in, they resign from the team
 - you reserve the right to revisit the decision



Some Video Examples: Anticipation



Level 2: "Assume"



Some Video Examples: Anticipation



Level 4: “Rigid”



Some Video Examples: Anticipation



Level 3: “Frosty”



Some Video Examples: Picking Up Teammates



Level 2: “Blame Game”



Some Video Examples: Picking Up Teammates



Level 4: “Overcompensate”



Some Video Examples: Picking Up Teammates



Level 3: “An Opportunity”



Some Video Examples: Baserunning Mindset



Level 2: “Conservative”



Some Video Examples: Baserunning Mindset



Level 4: "Reckless"



Some Video Examples: Baserunning Mindset



Level 3: “Aggressive”



Correcting the “Level Four” Player...

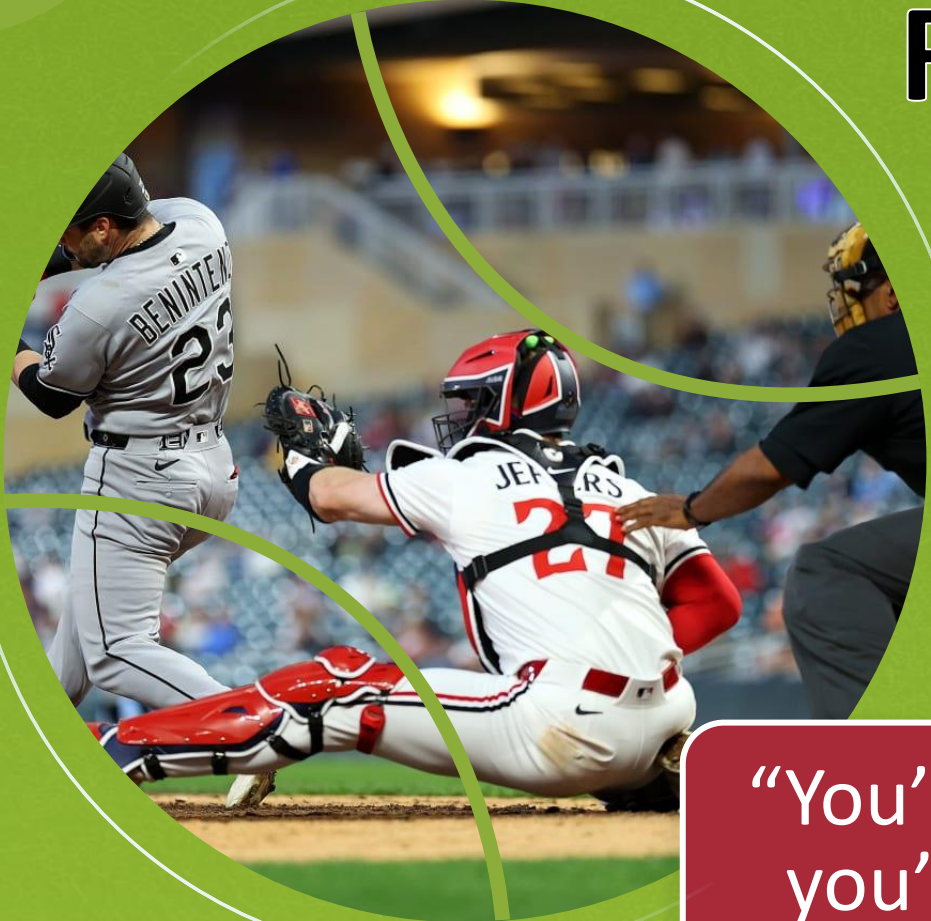
- Who?
 - Multi-sport athletes (especially football, hockey)
 - Guys wired “that way”
- When?
 - NOT in the moment; afterwards (even the next day)
- How?
 - Conversational; dispassionate
- Why?
 - So they’re in a better position to succeed the next time



Coach's Homework...

Regarding Chirping:

- It's a big problem...and it's gross
- Symptomatic of today's world
- Don't be part of the problem...
be part of the solution!
- Talk to other coaches about it



“You’re either coaching it...or
you’re letting it happen!”





Masshole Story/Joke

Thank You!!



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