

# The Importance of Teamwork

By Dominick Wytovich

"Strike three," the umpire shouted. Billy looked in disbelief as the umpire called him out on a ball that was way outside the batter's hitting zone. "That wasn't a strike," Billy protested. The umpire shook his head and pointed to the bench. Billy turned, lowered his head and walked slowly back to the dug out, kicking at the dirt with his worn-out baseball spikes. When he returned to the dug out Billy threw his bat against the wall causing it to vibrate with a loud ping. The game was over, and Billy was the cause of it.

Billy was a ninth grader at Springdale High School. He was an only child. His parents had been divorced for 12 years now, and he lived with his mother. Billy loved to play baseball. He had been playing the game since he was six years old and it has always been fun for him. Billy was always the best on the team, and all of his teammates relied on him. He was pretty much a one-man team. He never had to worry about not getting a starting position because he was the best. Billy demonstrated a great attitude and avoided becoming having his head in the clouds because of his talent. Now that he was starting to play high school baseball, his perspective about the sport changed drastically. He suddenly realized this would be the first year his dad would not be his coach.

The first day of practice rolled around and Billy was fine-tuned. He had been going to his hitting coach for the past five months and he had his swing in a groove. The first day of practice consisted of the usual lecture when the coach gives the players an explanation of who he is and why he is there. Coach Riggley said, "I am here to make you better baseball players and also to win." He also said that he played the best players because he wanted to win, and there were no positions guaranteed to any players. Billy's friend, Ryan, gave a little laugh, turned toward Billy and said, "Isn't that what all coaches say?"

Billy looked at Ryan, smiled and replied, "Yeah, I know." Billy was sure that their catcher J.J. Thompson already had the catcher's position and that most of the seniors would be starting but Billy was determined to get a starting position. He was always the best, and he feared that was all about to change.

For the next few weeks, Billy and Ryan worked hard, always doing what the coach said and never fooling around. Billy realized that he didn't have a chance at a spot in the infield and settled for trying for the outfield. He had never played outfield. He mostly played second base with Ryan at shortstop. Ryan also realized that he didn't have a chance at shortstop, so he changed and tried out for third base.

The days flew by, and with the first scrimmage near Billy worked intensely at catching every fly ball that came to him. He also kept his batting swing in line and tried to draw some attention to himself by running his line sprints faster than anyone.

The day of the first scrimmage arrived, and it was against Dormont. Dormont wasn't in the section so the team didn't know if they were any good. Coach Riggley put the starting nine positions on the wall with the names of the players who would be starting in those positions. Billy scanned the list, but he didn't see his name. With head lowered and shoulders sagging, he returned to his seat and started eating sunflower seeds with Ryan.

Then coach Riggley walked up to the wall where he had put the defensive positions and placed another white piece of

paper next to it. All the players lined up to read it. It was the batting order with all 33 players of in. Billy looked up and down the list and finally found his name at the bottom in the 23<sup>rd</sup> batter's spot. His heart sank. All that hard work he had put in and this is where he was being placed. Billy sat down and thought about the scenario. "Maybe, it's because I'm a freshman, but why 23<sup>rd</sup>," he said to himself.

The game went through the innings and Billy found the field in the 6<sup>th</sup> inning. It was the longest game he had ever watched. It was so boring. Now he knew what the other players felt like when he played and never came out of the game and they sat on the bench picking splinters out of their butts.

Billy ran out to his position. He was assigned to play center field. Billy was ready for any ball that wanted to come his way. The inning came and went, and he never got a ball. Finally it was Billy's turn to bat. He approached the plate with east and stepped into the batter's box. The umpire proclaimed, "Play Ball."

The pitcher started his wind up and delivered the first pitch. "Strike one", the umpire shouted. The pitch was right down the middle. Billy knew that he should have swung at that pitch. Billy looked at Coach Riggley and stepped back into the batter's box.

The next pitch was eye level, and Billy swung and missed. "Strike two," the umpire shouted. Now Billy was in a hole with the count at zero and two. He had to protect the plate. The next two pitches were balls and that evened the count at two and two. The next pitch delivered by the pitcher was a curve ball. It fooled Billy and the umpire called, "Strike three!" Billy turned and walked back to the dugout. This truly was the worst day of his life.

Billy really didn't find much playing time that year. He decided to put it behind him and prepare for next year. He trained all winter with his hitting coach and sharpened his skills. As his sophomore year rolled around, he knew this was his chance to play.

Billy worked hard and earned the left field position. He also was the lead off hitter. He made many great plays that year and helped to take his team to the playoffs. Springdale High School made it to the quarterfinals in the playoffs. That was the furthest that a Springdale baseball team ever made it before.

Billy learned that hard work and a dedication to the game pays off in the end. He also learned that baseball isn't a one-man sport. It takes teamwork to win, and Billy learned to play with his fellow teammates with a passion, and he is already preparing for next year's baseball season.



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