

You Never Know Who's Watching

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High School Baseball Web

The statement above is a common one used on this web site. It means that a player should hustle and give his best effort every time he steps on the field. That includes practice and games.

Because You Never Know Who's Watching

This past weekend I was fortunate enough to be allowed to sit with several college coaches as they evaluated talent at a very good high school baseball tournament. This was a small tournament with only six invited teams, held at a major division 1 college campus. A "showcase" tournament.

No player's names are being used, no teams are being mentioned and I will try to stay as generic as possible with the description of these players. The focus of this article is to make a point, not to embarrass any particular player.

The following are some of the comments and discussions that I was allowed to listen in on:

The first involves a player with a "national reputation" listed as a top prospect in several sources that I am familiar with. He is a position player. The coaches were in agreement that this player had several nice tools Good arm strength, good glove and good speed. The question that each of them had was his ability to hit at the upper end of college baseball. Some coaches told me that the solid tools that the player had would make him a prospect to them even without "plus" hitting abilities.

What happened next amazed even me. The player was struggling with his bat but showed flashes of an "upside." However on defense the player did not move well. Did not show good anticipation, did not follow foul balls (showing a jump). More often than not only moved from his position if he was involved in the play.

Some of the coaches REALLY did not like the "lazy" (their words – not mine) attitude shown. On a couple of stolen base attempts (where the player was covering the bag) he did not make an attempt to stop a "less than perfect" throw. Basically he flagged at the ball and got out of the way.

One coach told me that he wanted players that were interested in "sticking their nose in there and getting dirty." This coach is with a team that would be considered a "national power."

Some of the coaches told me that they would have to see the player again – later this summer before making any decision regarding a potential scholarship offer. Other coaches told me that they probably would not pursue this player any further.

Next Up - A right handed pitcher that was throwing solidly in the upper 80's. He has a slight movement on his fastball, an okay breaking ball and a fair change-up.

This player however did impress many of the coaches. WHY ????

He did not have his best control at times. At times was getting penalized by a "moving" and small strike zone, and had 5 errors made behind him, by his defense.

What caught the coach's attention was his ability to battle and keep challenging the hitters. He did not drop his head or slump his shoulders when things went against him. He showed no expression when a ball was called on an obvious strike. He even went so far as to walk over and speak to his second baseman, after a costly error and then pat him on the back as he walked away. The coaches I was sitting near did not miss this!

Each of the coaches that I spoke to admitted that they did not have the player on their lists of potential recruits. Each also said that they would be making a point to see the player pitch again this summer.

This player became a prospect with several "big time" schools on a day when he was the losing pitcher and did not have his best stuff. Because of his attitude and the heart he showed.

Third Example: Is a big first baseman. This young man does not run like a gazelle, does not have a great arm. (average at best) He is not what you would term "athletic" but he is not fat. However he made points with several of the coaches in attendance.

Of course you have guessed it by now The young man can hit with the best of them.

There is a little more to the story though. He can hit to all fields with power. He displayed a good ability to "go with a pitch." He showed a good knowledge of the strike zone. I personally did not see him chase a bad pitch.

With runners on second and third and no outs in a one run ball game this young man hit a ground ball to the right side of the infield. He did this with a 2-strike count. He made an out and the run scored. He did his job for his team.

He hit a home run or two over the weekend, a double or two to the spacious gaps, had several "screaming" singles, but more importantly he hustled!

This player ran hard on and off the field, every inning He did not quit as most of his teammates did in a blow out loss at one point in the tournament. As one pro scout commented to me "A "player" never changes his game, no matter what the score. A "player" plays as hard if his team is behind seven runs or ahead seven runs, or if his team is in a one run ballgame."

If you think that college coaches and professional scouts do not notice the "little things" you are mistaken. As one coach told me "We have to pay attention to each of the intangibles, it is the only real separator between some of these guys." He went on to explain that each recruiting year they will have several players on their board that are essentially equal in athletic skills and ability. What then makes the difference is the "Little Things."

So the next time you think that it doesn't matter how you hustle or present yourself maybe you should revisit that part of your game. As another coach told me ... "A player can hustle and give his maximum effort even on a day when he and/or his team is not playing their best game. It doesn't take any athletic ability to hustle." YOU NEVER KNOW WHO'S WATCHING!