

Preparing for the Game

When I was a kid, it wasn't unusual for me to spend more time preparing for a game than actually playing it. My little brother Heath and I were pretty ridiculous really. I mean, how hard could it possibly be to get ready for back yard wiffle ball? You take a plastic ball and hit it with a plastic bat, right? Not us.

We'd usually begin the day hauling in fresh dirt from my grandpa's garden to build up the pitcher's mound we'd erected in his yard. Then I'd send Heath off to snatch a few pillows from the house to use as bases while I spray painted a strike zone on the pump house. After that, we'd drag out our aluminum bats and start wrapping the plastic ball with enough black electrical tape to mummify a woolly mammoth. At some point we'd eventually get around to singing the National Anthem and announce, "Play ball!"

I can still almost remember my L.A. Dodger's roster like it was yesterday, with the likes of Steve Garvey, Kirk Gibson, Don Sutton, and the Mexican sensation, Fernando Valenzuela. Heath chose to be Nolan Ryan and the Houston Astros. What I wouldn't give to go back and see us imitating those greats. It must've been hilarious. It was certainly always a production, fully orchestrated with a roaring crowd and a detailed play by play, courtesy of yours truly.

Heath stayed madder than a shoe full of fire ants claiming the crowd cheered louder for my Dodgers. He even had the nerve to try to do his own crowd noises sometimes. What an egomaniac!

Since I've always possessed such a keen sense of justice, I elected myself to be the rule maker. Heath had his objections, but since I was six years older and sixty pounds heavier, he mostly learned to keep them to himself. Besides, I promised to uphold the most rigid standards of fairness here at Dodger stadium.

To make things competitive I unselfishly proclaimed I would only take one out per inning. However, even then, Heath learned that if he didn't score his runs early he'd be in trouble. Inevitably, toward the end of the game, Coach Tommy Lasorda would bring in his ace pitcher, everybody's hero, big Guy Sheffield. Big Guy would swagger out to a standing ovation, wink at the ladies, and begin heaving up a fastball clocking in at well over a hundred miles per hour. At least it must've seemed that fast to little Heath, who stood a scant thirty feet away, already whimpering from the whelps he'd suffered under Fernando's non-breaking curve balls. Heath was a trooper though. He'd snug that helmet down tight and nervously edge up to the plate to face me like the little eight year old man I'd forced him to be, else he knew he'd take a beating.

On those rare occasions the Astros led by the end of regulation, the head umpire (also me) would instate the 'Three outs in the last inning' rule for the Dodgers. Heath would get so mad he could just spit. However, since he'd learned spitting was cause for ejection, most of the time he'd just throw down his glove and run in the house crying. At which point, he'd be disqualified and the Dodger's would be declared winners by default.

You're probably thinking, "What a louse!" I don't blame you. Clearly Heath had no respect for my authority. **JUST KIDDING!** Obviously it was me who took no thought for the feelings or property of others. I was the self-absorbed one, determined to get my way at all cost, even if it meant bullying an eight year old. Yes, I was the egomaniac, self righteous, exalting myself and making up the rules as I went. I don't blame you at all if you're feeling a little disgusted with me.

I just hope I can raise my kids to do better. I've got my work cut out for me. Have you examined some of these people our kids are encouraged to look up to these days? A lot of them display some pretty nasty traits themselves. The difference is, these days they're being applauded for it! Is there any distinction left between being famous and being infamous in America today? You ask a kid what he wants to do with his life you're likely to hear, "Whatever it takes to get on TV dog." If that's what we're teaching our children it's no wonder our society as a whole is beginning to deny the existence of an absolute truth, and particularly the One who spoke it. Their consciences demand it.

By God's grace I finally learned that we are not the head umpire! There is a God, the God of the Bible; the only true God. His Word *is* the absolute Truth. Sure, we can deny it, we may even get our 10.3 minutes of fame, but don't think we won't be held accountable one day. Jesus warned, (*But all who reject me and my message will be judged on the day of judgment by the truth I have spoken.* **John 12:48** NLT)

But anyway- Kids need a lot of help preparing for this game of life. Most importantly, they need to be introduced to Jesus, a true 'Great' for them to imitate. I'm not sure at what point this concept may have gone out of vogue here in America.

-Guy Sheffield 6-07-07