

Harvey Dorfman

This Giant In Field Of Baseball Mental Teaching Has Plenty To Say



BRIAN CAIN

BY BRIAN CAIN
Special To Collegiate Baseball

RICHMOND, Vt.—During the summer of 1998, I was pitching for the Eastern Tides (Conn.) of the New England Collegiate Baseball League.

I was a struggling pitcher from The University of Vermont, trying to find my pitching abilities that had seemed to vanish since I had graduated from high school.

My roommate was Mike Leavy, a catcher from Dartmouth College. The book he left on the table that changed my life forever was *The Mental Game of Baseball* by H.A. Dorfman.

I remember picking up *The Mental Game of Baseball* and not being able to put it down.

That was a first. *The Mental Game of Baseball* was the first book I remember picking from cover to cover.

It grabbed me and held my attention like no other book had up to that point in my life.

I was looking, looking for something or someone that would help me turn my career around. Unfortunately for me, I got injured and my career was over shortly thereafter.

A career in which maybe could have had a more successful outcome, had I been turned on to the mental game by a coach at an earlier age.

I had a great work ethic, was a good teammate and wanted to succeed more than most. That was the biggest problem. I wanted it TOO much. I wanted to be so good that I could not get out of my own way. I was a mental midget, but have come to realize that there are no mental midgets, only people who are mentally trained and people who are not.

Reading *The Mental Game of Baseball* inspired me to explore the psychological and mental aspects of the game.

I read Dorfman's four other books; *The Mental ABC's of Pitching*, *The Mental Keys To Hitting*, *Coaching The Mental Game*, and his autobiography *Persuasion of my Days*.

These books captivated me and motivated me to pursue a degree in Sport Psychology with the author of another tremendous mental game book called *Heads-Up Baseball*, by Ken Ravizza and Tom Hanson.

Ken Ravizza remains to this day the single most influential person in my life. I owe him everything.

He has been a true friend and a mentor that I only hope all aspiring coaches have an opportunity to come in contact with.

But Harvey Dorfman and *The Mental Game of Baseball* was my first taste of the psychological aspects of baseball.

Ten years after first reading *The Mental Game of Baseball*, through a mutual friend, I was able to spend a day with Dorfman.

Below are the highlights and extensive experience I gained from meeting one of my greatest heroes and from meeting a man solely responsible for providing me with my life's mission of being a successful Mental Game of Baseball Coach, and to giving back to the game what it has given me.

Awareness, Strategy, Implementation

One of the foundations of the mental game that Dorfman talked about was "developing an awareness in the athlete." An awareness of what their self-talk and thoughts are and an awareness of what situations tend to put players into a state where they perform at less than their best.

He said, "Once athletes have an awareness of what they are thinking and feeling, they can do something to change it. What you are aware of, you can control. What you are unaware of will control you."

"Getting athletes and coaches to become aware of what they do to perform at their best is equally important as to get them to know what they are doing when they perform at less than their best."

Once the coach or athlete has an awareness of what is hurting their performance, the next step is to develop a strategy to get you back into your peak performing state.

"Once the athlete is aware, they can develop strategies to use to shift their thinking to something that is going to be task relevant and help their performance," Dorfman said.

"Once athletes are aware, the goal is to educate them on a strategy they can use to perform better. There is not one strategy that will work for all in every situation. There is no cookbook approach to sport psychology. It is about knowing the athlete and finding a strategy that works for them."

"Once the athlete has an awareness and a strategy to use, the final piece of the performance puzzle is for them to implement the strategy. I often use the example: K-A=0. Knowledge minus action equals no change. ACTION must take place for there to be any performance improvement. Implementation of the strategy must happen."

"When an athlete has awareness and a strategy they must use the strategy that they have."

"As a Mental Game coach, once the athlete has developed the awareness and we have worked with them to develop a strategy, the responsibility becomes theirs to implement it," Dorfman said.

"Nobody can do that for them. It is the responsibility of the man in the arena to use what he knows."

Taking Credit For Success

When an athlete reaches the pinnacle of their career, the major leagues, people will come out of the woodwork to try and become a part of their success. One thing that successful athletes need to learn is who they should listen to and who they should let go in one ear and out the other.

"Many times coaches will try to change a pitcher's or a player's mechanics to do something the way the coach wants them to because then the coach can satisfy his ego by taking some of the credit for the success of the athlete," Dorfman said.

"If a player is good enough to make it to the upper echelon of sport, they have found a way that works for them. It may not look great, and it may not be the most 'economical way' scientifically, but if it works for the athlete and it is the athlete's natural mechanic, why change it?"

"Athletes and coaches need to use a filter when listening to others who have their own best interest in mind, not the best interest of the athlete."