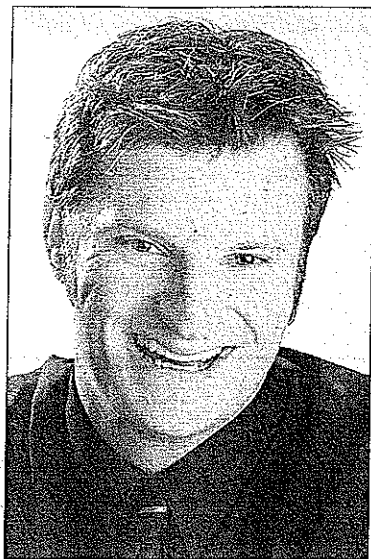


WILMINGTON, N.C. — The University of North Carolina Wilmington has won over 40 games each of the past four seasons, a feat only accomplished by a handful of teams across the nation.

However, this off-season, the Seahawks are looking for the missing piece of the puzzle that they think can put them over the top and cement them amongst

the collegiate baseball elite. That missing piece is mental training

"We have had a lot of physically-gifted players who work extremely hard, and we have talked about the mental game on occasion, but this fall we really tried to explore more of the mental game and take it to another level," pitching coach Scott Jackson said. "He (Brian Cain) came in for a three-day seminar and really broke down the mental game to the finest details. Our guys responded great and have really



**BRIAN CAIN**

enjoyed the benefits of his work on the mental game in our fall practice and intra-squad games."

#### **New Approach To Bullpen**

Jackson, one of the top young pitching coaches in the country, found that he was spending the majority of his time in the bullpen on mechanical work and did not give enough time for the pitchers to throw competitive, game-like pens.

"I fell into the trap of always working on mechanics and rarely would let the guys get after it from a competitive standpoint in the pen," Jackson said. "Now I have them throw to a stand-in hitter every pitch, have them working their routine and breath between each pitch, and really have them focusing on making quality pitches.

"The guys have responded greatly because they are simulating what they will be doing on the game mound, competing. I will admit it; I spent too much time preaching mechanics and not enough time getting the competitor to come out from inside them.

"I think I am like most coaches in that I would rather have a guy on the game mound with a bulldog mentality and less than great mechanics, than a guy with great mechanics and a less than

aggressive mentality. Yet how much time do we spend on coaching mentality versus mechanics?"

#### **Hitters Focus on Quality**

Seahawks hitting coach Randy Hood, expressed how the mental game has helped his hitters to become more in control at the plate, give away fewer at-bats and focus on quality game-like reps, not just putting in their time in the cage.

"When I first started coaching, I felt that you would be successful largely to the degree to what time and extra effort you put in hitting in the cages and getting a lot of reps," Hood said. "However, I have changed my perspective on that approach. I think that getting good quality swings with a game-like focus and a game-like process of going through your routine each and every swing, just like you are going to do in a game, is far more productive.

#### **Game Like Practice Is Key**

"We want our hitters to play one pitch at a time during games, but how often do we let them do that in practice? Practice makes permanent and it is unfair for me to ask any of our players to do anything in a game setting that they have not yet been able to do a hundred times in practice. If we want to play one pitch at a time in games, we need to get them playing one pitch at a time in practice, nothing should change.

"Yes, there is a time where we will work on just swing mechanics, but I would rather have a guy at the plate with the right swing thought and mental process and an average swing than I would have a guy who has a picture perfect swing, but a less than aggressive mindset."

#### **Signal Light Awareness**

Playing the game one pitch at a time is about having an awareness of where you are at physically and emotionally between each pitch. When you can stay in control of yourself, you give yourself the best chance for success by having quality at-bats and cutting down the

number of at-bats you give away.

"Each of our hitters has a signal light on their bat," Hood said. "They each have a red, yellow and green sticker that Cain gave them and they use that as a focal point on their bat between each pitch. We spent a lot of time talking with them about developing an awareness of their internal traffic light and when things start to go south, what they can do to turn the at-bat around.

"We have them focus on the green label on the bat and take a good deep breath from their belly. If they can do that, and focus on the green dot, and really see it, then the hitter knows they are in control of themselves and are playing one pitch at a time. As a coach, I can also see where my players are at mentally by being able to observe them going through their routine. I know if a player does something different than what is in their routine, they are either holding onto a previous pitch, or are in fast forward mode and must check in and release before they give that at-bat away."

#### **Reminders of Success**

All players at UNCW have utilized a focal point in the outfield that they can turn to when the game starts speeding up on them, or if they realize that they are in a yellow or red light. That focal point serves as a box of positive thoughts that players can turn to for reassurance that they are in control and playing one pitch at a time.

"We use the focal point everyday in the bullpen and on the game mound," Jackson said. "I have written down what our pitchers use as their focal point and it has worked great because in the bullpen, I will often have them verbalize out loud what they are saying to themselves to get back in control. It is great for me to hear what their self-talk is that they use to get back in-control because I can then build off of that and tailor my approach to each individual pitcher.

See **FOCAL** . Page 19

*Mental Training Paying Off For  
N.C. Wilmington Baseball Program*

1/2

# Focal Point Essential For Flushing Away Mistakes

Continued From Page 16

"I like seeing our hitters go to the focal point both on offense and defense," Hood said. "If we have a guy who makes an error, I want to see him turn his back to home plate, look at his focal point, pull his chest up and flush away the mistake. It is great for me because as a coach I can see a guy who makes an error, or misses a great pitch, go to their focal point, take a couple good breaths, release the negative and then get right back to playing one pitch at a time."

"What it allows us to do as a coaching staff is take a negative experience for a player, i.e. throwing a bad pitch, making an error, etc., and it allows us to catch them being good," Jackson said. "In my coaching career I have always been looking for a way to turn a negative into a positive and if you can catch a player doing something good after they make a mistake, if you can catch them going to their focal point and flushing the negative, you can then praise that player for doing everything they can do to get back to the present moment and playing pitch by pitch."

## New Toilet In Dugout

The Seahawks are building a new clubhouse and are constructing major renovations to their facilities this season, but quite possibly the most important addition to their program this year might be the new toilet in the home team's dugout.

"Cam left us with a toilet that our players and staff will flush when they make a mistake or things are not going their way," Hood said. "Every time one of our guys flushes that thing and you hear the toilet,



## This toy toilet worked its magic for LSU as well.

you have to laugh.

"Baseball is a tough game that can beat you up because no matter what you do, you are always going to fail more than you succeed. When our guys flush the toilet and laugh, it loosens them up and allows their true talents to come out.

"Our guys are ultra-competitive and have dedicated their lives to playing baseball. That being the case, they tend to all try too hard and put too much pressure on themselves to be perfect. The toilet serves as a reminder that this game is fun and that you can't take things too seriously or your performance is going to suffer. Our guys will often come into the dugout after making an error or striking out and flush the toilet; you can almost instantly see the weight come off of their shoulders."

## Trap Of Result Thinking

Jackson says that the process of how you go about doing things is

There is a correlation between the two."

## Fixture In Bullpen

Steve Zawrotny, the director of [www.baseballfit.com](http://www.baseballfit.com), has developed a great tool for the bullpen called the Designated Hitter. The DH is a six-foot tall replica of a batter that lives in the UNCW bullpen and takes a beating, but never complains.

"The DH has been great for our pitchers," Jackson said. "Most pitchers don't like having a hitter on their own team, or a pitcher who stands in because they do not want to hit a teammate.

"Subsequently when we practice going inside, our pitchers get timid. That can't happen if you want to be successful.

"Some guys think that throwing to the inside of the plate without a hitter in there is the same thing as having a hitter in there. Not true. The task changes visually for the pitcher and that often results in a different mindset, a tentative mindset, when attacking the inside part of the dish.

"The DH looks just like a real hitter and we use it in all of our pens. We stress to our pitchers that every pitch in the bullpen should be with a game-like mentality. As their pitching coach, if I don't have a stand-in hitter, I am limiting their ability to make the pen game-like because when do you ever throw a pitch without a hitter in the batter's box? NEVER.

"Our pitchers have really enjoyed throwing to the DH. They can come inside with an aggressive pitch thought and blow it up. If they hit the DH, nobody cares. That is the type of aggressiveness

and mentality that I work very hard at developing in our pitchers. Every bullpen in America should have one."

## Mental Minutes Hotline

Another source of mental toughness the Seahawks coaching staff has taken advantage of with their players is the Mental Minutes Hotline, a free mental game/motivational hotline by Brian M. Cain, MS, CAA, Peak Performance Coach.

The hotline is a 2-3 minute recording that changes everyday between 7-8 a.m. EST and offers daily mental game messages for coaches and players to use as constant reinforcement and repetition of the mental game. The number is toll free 1-800-639-5875 x5 x5

"The Mental Minutes Hotline is great," Hood said. "I will have at least 4-5 guys every day come up to me and ask me if I heard today's message and then we talk about it. They love it.

"Everyone thinks that Coke and Pepsi are the two best tasting sodas out there, but the reason why they are so widely recognized is because they spend so much money on advertising. The Mental Minutes Hotline is that advertising and reinforcement for the Mental Game. I can't encourage you enough to call the hotline; you will see why our players and staff are all such big fans."

For more information on Mental Training for Hitting, Mental Training for Pitching, and the Mental Game of Baseball visit [www.BrianCainBaseball.com](http://www.BrianCainBaseball.com)