

Baseball Team Devotion- The RBI

Scripture Lesson: Luke 15:1-10

The RBI or run batted in is a statistic that can bring great joy to your team, especially if it is a game winning RBI. Can you name the ways a player can be credited with an RBI? (base hit, sacrifice fly, ground out that scores a run, squeeze play, bases loaded walk, bases loaded hit batsman). Did you know the Major League record for RBIs in a single season is 191 by Chicago Cub Hack Wilson in 1930? That record was set in a 154 game season. The Major League record for RBIs in a career is held by Hank Aaron of the Braves with 2297 RBIs. That is a lot of RBIs! Can you remember the joy that came to your team with a walk off RBI to win the game? It is a feeling of pure joy! Have you ever had a game winning RBI? How did it feel?

In today's Scripture lesson, Jesus has gathered around Him to hear Him teach a collection of sinners and tax collectors. The Pharisees or religious leaders of the day could not believe that Jesus welcomed those people. Jesus often taught in parables or word pictures that made heavenly points. He tells 2 parables of people who had lost something. In the first parable a shepherd had lost one of his one hundred sheep. The second parable is about a woman who lost one of her ten silver coins. In both parables the lost sheep and coin were searched for until they were found. When the sheep and the coin were found there was great rejoicing. Jesus' point in the parables is simple. When someone who is away from God returns there is great joy in heaven. The joy of the game winning RBI is wonderful, but it pales to the celebration that occurs in heaven when someone comes to God. That celebration is greater than imaginable! Today where are you with God? Are you living for Him? Maybe as a Christian there is someone you need to tell about Jesus. Want to set off a celebration in heaven? Then make your life right with God today. He is only a prayer away! Why not drive in a heavenly run for the Kingdom by telling the good news about Jesus to someone who needs to hear and by living for Christ each and everyday. That my friends will set off the greatest of all celebrations!

Visual aid: Great you tube video of Tigers clinching AL pennant in 2006

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lKQnkFkOaFQ>

Baseball Team Devotion- The Sacrifice Bunt

Scripture Lesson: 1John 2:1-2

The Sacrifice bunt is a play in baseball where the batter literally sacrifices his at bat to move the runner(s) up a base. Did you know that the Major League Leader in sacrifice bunts for this year (2009) was Javier Vazquez, a pitcher for the Braves, with 20. New York Met second base man Luis Castillo had 19 sacrifice bunts followed by Astro second base man Kaz Matsui with 18. To be among the league leaders in sacrifice bunts, one must not only be a good bunter, but also be willing to give up at bats to move the runners along. It is a play that puts your team in a position to score a run or runs. Baseball recognizes the unselfish giving done with a sacrifice bunt by not charging an official at bat to the person credited with the sacrifice bunt. So it really turns out to be a free at bat to help your team when the sacrifice bunt is successful.

Our Scripture lesson today reminds us of the greatest of all sacrifices. Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for not only our sins but the sins of the entire world. Jesus came to this world for only one purpose. That purpose was to die. He came to this world from the glories of heaven to die for our sins and mistakes. He paid the price we could never pay for the mistakes we have made. God gladly gave the life of His Son, Jesus to be the sacrifice for our sins. His death on the cross gives us the opportunity to accept the free gift of salvation. It is free for us, but it cost Almighty God the life of His Son. Who is Jesus to you today? Is He your Savior? Have you given Him your heart and life? Maybe today we need to clean the sin out of our lives by confessing those sins to Him and asking for forgiveness. Don't ever forget what Jesus did for you and me. He paid the price for our sins and gives us a way to spend eternity in heaven. The sacrifice bunt can put us in the position to win the game. What Jesus did for us gives us the opportunity to be a winner in the game of life. I am so glad He loves us that much!

Visual aid: Great music video about crucifixion on you tube

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNgBYdDZA8> Also any clip from the Passion of the Christ.

Baseball Team Devotion- The Screwball

Scripture Lesson: Romans 7:15-25

The Screwball is a pitch that does just the opposite of a usual breaking ball. (This pitch should only be thrown at an advanced age when the arm has reached maturity.) Instead of a breaking pitch from a right handed pitcher breaking towards a left-handed batter, the ball will break away from the left-handed batter. Perhaps the most famous screwball pitcher of all time was a pitcher who pitched for the then New York Giants, Hall of Famer Carl Hubbell. In the 1934 All-Star Game, Hubbell accomplished an amazing feat of pitching. The first two batters reached base and up came Babe Ruth. Hubbell proceeded to end the first by striking out Hall of Famers, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, and Jimmy Foxx. Hubbell continued the strike out barrage in the second by striking out Hall of Famers Al Simmons and Joe Cronin. Five Hall of Fame hitters all struck out in a row, Hubbell's screwball was the key pitch. The screwball does just the opposite and it is difficult to hit.

In our Scripture lesson today, the Apostle Paul is struggling. He doesn't understand what he is doing, for what he wants to do he doesn't do and what he does not want to do he does. He seems to be doing just the opposite. Paul realizes a very important fact of life. Sin causes us to do what we should not be doing and to leave undone the things we should be about doing. There is only one cure for opposite living and it is found in verse 25. "Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord." Paul goes on in Chapter 8 to say there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. When life throws us a screwball, when we seem to be doing the things we should not be doing and fail to do the things we know we should be doing, the only way to get a hit in life is to give our all to Christ. He forgives us our sins and gives us the inner strength through the Holy Spirit to battle against the forces of evil. Satan is all throwing us screwballs, trying to get us to do the opposite. But with Christ on our side, no matter how good Satan's screwball is (even better than Hubbell's), we will get a hit every time. Saying yes to Christ gives us the power to defeat evil and to live the life we want to live for Him. Been failing in the game of life? Maybe it is time to trust the Savior, and give your life to Him totally and completely.

Visual aid: google how to throw a screwball and show the players the grip and motion with a ball.

Baseball Team Devotion-The Single

Scripture Lesson: John 14:6

Did you know that the Major League record for singles in a season was set in 2004 by Ichiro Suzuki of the Seattle Mariners, when he hit an astounding 225 singles in his rookie season. There are many ways to get a single: a bunt single, how about an infield hit that the runner beats the throw to first, there is the bloop hit that falls between the infield and the outfield, there is also the ground ball that sneaks between the infielders, and finally the solid line drive that falls in front of the oncoming outfielder. There are a number of ways to get a single to get the runner to first. Many rallies in the game of baseball begin with a simple single. Can you think of the last time your team started a game winning rally with some kind of a single? That single got everyone started and helped set the stage for a comeback win.

Even though there are many ways to get a single, to be safe at first, there is only one way to be safe with God. Our Scripture lesson today is as plain as can be. There is only ONE WAY to be safe with God and that is through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus said these words on the last night of His earthly life before his death on the cross. He is talking to His disciples and wants them to know that even though He is going to die, that through His death and resurrection that is the way to God. The only way to experience the life of blessings God has planned for you is to accept His Son as your Lord and Savior, to give your life to Him. Today are you safe with God? Do you know without a doubt that if you died tonight you would spend eternity with God in heaven? There is only one way to be safe, one way to be able to answer that eternal question with a yes, that is by the Lord Jesus Christ who says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Are you safe with God? You know you can be and He is only a prayer away.

Visual aid: Take a stop watch and time a few of the players running to first (beating out an infield single). Give a prize to the winner.

Baseball Team Devotion- The Slider

Scripture Lesson: Joshua 7:1-5, 11-12, 8:1-2

The slider can be a very tough pitch to hit. The slider is the fastest of the breaking balls. Its strength is it APPEARS to be a fastball and at the last moment the pitch has a very sharp break. Hitters think they are going to get a fastball and often times a great slider will throw them off balance. Future Hall of Fame pitchers Randy Johnson and John Smoltz are known for devastating sliders. That is where a great many of their strikeouts and victories can be found, in the mastering of the slider. The slider APPEARS to be something it is not and can cause a lot of problems for hitters who think they are about to get a fastball. The slider's strength is it APPEARS to be a fastball, but in fact it is a breaking ball.

In today's Scripture lesson the children of Israel have just won a very impressive victory against the city of Jericho. God gave them a great victory and confidence was at an all time high. The next city in their path to conquer the Promised Land was the small insignificant city of Ai. Joshua sent out scouts and they came back saying that the upcoming battle would be easy, so easy in fact we only need to send a small part of the army to fight. So Joshua sent only 3,000 men to fight what APPEARED to be a very easy battle. The Israelites were routed from the field and lost 36 men killed. Confidence was now at an all time low with the unexpected defeat. When Joshua approached God wondering what could have gone wrong. Everything APPEARED to be great. God told Joshua someone had sinned and took things from Jericho which was forbidden. God would not be with them until the sinner Achan was punished. He was and in Chapter 8 God gave the people a great victory. What APPEARED to be a sure victory was taken away because of sin. I have to wonder, how many times do we think everything is great when in fact sin is keeping us from living the victorious Christian life? Satan wants to make it APPEAR that our sin won't find us out and that we can just go through the motions. Today our challenge is to look at ourselves just the way we are. Is there anything keeping us from experiencing the victorious Christian life God has in store for us? Things may APPEAR good but just like with the slider, we can be fooled. God is just a prayer away, why not confess that sin to Him now and celebrate the victory He has for us today.

Visual Aid: let a pitcher show you his slider grip or google how to grip a slider and demonstrate

Baseball Team Devotion- The Squeeze Play

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 8:5-13

One of the most exciting plays in baseball is the squeeze play. A squeeze play is when there is a runner on third with less than 2 outs and the manager or coach gives the sign for the batter to bunt. The idea is to get the runner in from third base and to catch the defense by surprise. There are two kinds of squeeze plays: the safety squeeze is when the runner on third waits for the batter to bunt the ball before breaking to the plate; the suicide squeeze is when the runner takes off for home as the pitcher is in his windup trusting the batter to get the bunt down. The manager or coach has to have a great deal of trust in the batter's ability to bunt to call a squeeze play, especially if it is a suicide squeeze. The runner is at the mercy of the batter's bunting skills on the suicide squeeze, for if the batter fails to get the bunt down then there is an easy out at the plate. But when the manager or coach's faith is shown to be true, the squeeze play is worth a run. I have seen games won on the execution of the suicide squeeze.

In our Scripture lesson today Jesus has just entered Capernaum which served as His home base around the Sea of Galilee. A Roman centurion (soldier) came to Jesus to ask for His help. The centurion's servant was very sick and he felt unworthy to have Jesus come to his home. The centurion believed and had so much faith in Jesus, if He just said the word his servant would be healed. When Jesus saw this great faith He was astonished for He had not seen that kind of faith in anyone in Israel. Jesus turned to the centurion and said, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." The Bible says the servant was healed at that very hour. With a squeeze play the manager's faith in the batter's ability to lay down the bunt is often rewarded by a run being scored. There is no greater call for a Christian than to have faith in Jesus and in the promises found in God's Word. How is our faith today? Do we believe enough to trust Him no matter what? God will always be there for us and his love is unfailing. He sent Christ to the world to die for our sins. Since Jesus died for us, do we have the faith to live for Him? What a great reward we will receive one day when Jesus says to us "Well done good and faithful servant." All we need is to live by faith!

Visual Aid: Have a bat and demonstrate a bunt as you talk about the squeeze play.

Baseball Team Devotion-The Stolen Base

Scripture Lesson: Proverbs 18:10

One of the most exciting plays in baseball is the stolen base. Everything must work together for the runner to steal. He must have a good lead, read the pitcher's move, and have a great first step. All good base stealers have those things in common. The career leader for stolen bases is Rickey Henderson with 1,406. He also holds the single season record with 130 in 1982 while playing for the Oakland Athletics. In 2009 the stolen base leaders were in the AL Jacoby Ellsbury of the Boston Red Sox with 70 and the NL leader was Michael Bourne of the Houston Astros with 61. The stolen base enables the base runner to get in scoring position (stealing 2nd), get to where it is easier to score (stealing 3rd), and even in the rare occasions score by stealing home. When a person steals successfully they are safe. The next time you watch a MLB game pay attention to the leads, moves, and first steps of the base stealers.

In today's Scripture lesson the writer of Proverbs reminds us of another way to be safe. Not safe in stealing a base, but safe in life: "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run to it and are safe." A tower signifies strength in the ancient world. If we run to the Lord and maintain a relationship with him we will be safe as if we were in a strong fortress. When we run to God, he is always there for us. God wants to help us in our daily living so that we can make a difference for him. Base stealers in baseball run with confidence that they will be safe. We can run the race called life with confidence if we run toward God. The goal of the stolen base is to be safe. The goal of life is to be safe and to run toward God. Today are we running toward God or are we running away from God? The only way to true happiness and contentment is to run to God and let Him direct our steps. Are we ready to run today and live a life that makes a difference for God?

Object lesson: you tube video Tribute to a legend: Rickey henderson

Baseball Team Devotion-The Strength Coach

Scripture Lesson: Psalms 18:1-2

Every Major League and Minor League team has a coach that is responsible for strength and conditioning of each player on the team. Everything from getting in good shape to getting stronger is covered. There are programs that are set up for position players and pitchers. Pitchers do a lot of running. As a matter of fact, they run everyday but Sunday unless you started the game the night before. The saying for pitchers is "Sunday fun day no run day!" The Strength and Conditioning Coach monitors each player and the progress they are making. Their main tasks are to get players in peak physical condition to play the game as well as getting them strong as possible. The Major and Minor League seasons are so long it takes great conditioning and strength to finish the year strong. They use a variety of exercises, running, and weight training to accomplish these goals.

Our Scripture lesson today tells us how to finish the game of life strong. When we realize, as the Psalmist tells us, that our strength is found in the Lord, we can finish strong. Sometimes life is difficult to live, problems come up that we may not know how to handle. God is our strength, and as the Psalmist says, He is also our rock, our fortress, our deliverer, and our shield. Those things tell us that not only will God supply the strength we need, He is also our protector. Isn't it great to know that when we struggle in baseball or when we struggle in life that God is there for us? God will provide strength and guidance to get us through the toughest of times. When David wrote this psalm he was running for his life. King Saul was out to kill him. Yet he knew that God had his back and would be there for him supplying his every need. God loves us so much, He is going to be there for us always. So remember the next time you struggle with baseball or life, God is only a prayer away.

Object lesson: Have the team run poles(from foul pole to foul pole). This is a typical run for Major and Minor League pitchers. Remind them that those pitchers run several poles at a time, not only one.

Baseball Team Devotion-The Strikeout

Scripture lesson: Matthew 19:16-22

Have you ever struck out in an at bat? I don't care who you are if you play the game of baseball you have struck out. Did you know that the career record for strikeouts is held by Hall of Famer Reggie Jackson with 2,597, followed by current Minnesota Twins player Jim Thome with 2,313? If on average a player gets 600 at bats a year, do you realize that Reggie Jackson would have gone over 4 years of his career without doing anything but strike out? The single season strikeout record is held by Arizona Diamondback infielder Mark Reynolds. In 2009 Mark struck out an astonishing 223 times, which is about once every three at bats. Strikeouts are no fun for the hitter, although pitchers like them. So don't be too hard on yourself when you strikeout, you will get another chance.

Today's Scripture lesson tells us about a guy who struck out with Jesus. A man came up to Jesus one day and asked Him how to receive eternal life. Jesus told the young man to obey the commandments. The man excitedly told Jesus he had done that since he was a boy. Jesus told him he lacked only one thing, go sell your possessions and give it all to the poor and come follow me. The Bible tells us the young man went away sad because he had great wealth. Jesus wanted the man to have nothing he loved more than Him. The rich young man struck out with Jesus because he loved something (his money) more than he loved Jesus. I think we all want to get a hit with Jesus and not strike out. Then my friends there can be nothing in this world more important to us than loving Jesus and following Him. That is hard isn't it? Jesus will help us if we only ask Him, so that we can live for Him and love Him as we should. Are we striking out with Jesus today because we don't love Him more than anything including baseball? We can get another chance, just like in baseball. It is so good that He loves us so much and is only a prayer away! Let's not strikeout with Jesus and let's love Him and live for Him each day!

Object Lesson: Get a picture of Reggie Jackson and Mark Reynolds off the internet to show the team.

Baseball Team Devotion-The Third Base Coach

Scripture Lesson: Mark 12:28-33

The Third Base Coach in baseball plays a vital role in the game. He directs the game from his coaching box. In college, high school, and youth leagues the Third Base Coach is most often the Head coach. While in professional baseball, the Third Base Coach receives signs from the dugout and passes them on to the players. The Third Base Coach directs the game through a series of signs he gives. He can tell a hitter to swing, take a pitch, hit and run, and bunt. He can tell the base runner to steal or not and whether or not to advance to the next base or hold there. The signs or directions he gives become more complicated the older the players become. Sometimes even Major League players either miss a sign or have to call time to confer with the Third Base Coach to make sure he has the right sign. Signs can be as simple as touching the sleeve for the runner to steal or touching the bill of the cap for bunt. The next time you see a professional game, watch the series of signs the Third Base Coach gives and how he directs the game.

We are very fortunate that we have someone who wants to direct the game of life for us. Jesus, many times in the Gospels, gives us directions for how to live our lives. Instead of using a series of signs from a third base coaching box, Jesus uses words from His heart and from His Father's heart. In our Scripture Lesson today, Jesus is asked which commandment is the most important of all. Or in other words what is the best direction you can give us. Jesus answers by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5, "Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, The Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Then He adds a second, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus has given us the signs for a life committed to God, love God with everything we have, every part of our being, as much as we can and to love our neighbor. So if we are to follow His coaching we will be all about LOVE. Did you get His signs? Are you ready to execute the play Jesus calls for in life? Then let's love like He commands us to each and everyday!

Visual Aid: Ask a player or coach to give the team sign for stealing or bunting or do the elementary signs described above for them to start the Team Devotion.

Baseball Team Devotion-The Triple

Scripture Lesson: 1Corinthians 9:24-26a

One of the most exciting plays in all of baseball is the triple. It is also the play that takes the longest. Even though Andrew McCutcheon of the Pittsburgh Pirates was in the Minor Leagues for the first two and one-half months of the 2009 season, he still finished fifth in the National League in triples with 9, only 4 behind the leader Shane Victorino of the Phillies. McCutcheon, known for his speed, was able in his first week to hit 2 triples in one game against the Atlanta Braves. He can fly and added 22 stolen bases to his impressive rookie campaign. He was named a member of the Topps All-Rookie Team and is one of the cornerstones in the rebuilding project of the Pirates. He has all five tools for a baseball player, he can hit, hit for power, field, throw, and run. Can he ever run!! The closest thing to a race in baseball is the triple, as the runner races to beat the throw to third.

In our Scripture Lesson today the Apostle Paul writes to the church at Corinth these words about running a race (read the Scripture). Paul wants us to run the race called life in such a way to get the prize. Paul is talking about running the race of life, running in such a way to receive the gift of eternal life in heaven. To win the race called life we must be in training to follow God daily with our lives and to live for Him. We must accept the free gift of salvation through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Satan wants nothing more for us to fall short, to give up and not live for God. He wants to throw us out before we can get safely to the end of our lives. It takes speed to get a triple in baseball. In life it takes determination to be the best we can be for God to win the race called life. God's triple is running in such a way to glorify Him, living for Him each day. Don't let Satan throw you out going to third, run in such a way to beat Satan and live for God. Do that and you will be safe every time in the race called life.

Visual Aid: Go to Pirates.com and search Topps Rookie All-Star McCutcheon for video highlights.

Baseball Team Devotion-The Two Seam Fastball

Scripture Lesson: Psalms 46:1-11

When a pitcher gets in trouble with runners on base and isn't overpowering, often times they resort to the two seam fastball or the sinker. This fastball tends to sink which makes hitting a ground ball the desired result. For it has been said that a double play is a pitcher's best friend. When pitchers can throw a good two seam fastball ground balls are often what happens. With a strong infield defense, a double play usually happens in that situation. The double play tends to either get the pitcher out of trouble or minimize the damage done in the inning. When runners are on base, have you ever said to your pitcher, "Hey, throw us a little ground ball." What in fact you asking him to do is throw the two seam fastball or sinker to get out of trouble in the inning.

In our Scripture lesson today we learn where we can turn when we get in trouble in the game of life. Psalm 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." Wow, what an awesome promise from His Word! God will be there for us to provide strength and refuge. We need not be afraid of what the world can throw at us for the Bible says God is an ever-present help. God is with us ALWAYS! The Psalmist goes on to say that no matter what happens, earthquakes and storms in life, God is with us and He is our fortress. The next time you get ready to throw that two seam fastball to get that groundball or you ask your pitcher to throw a little ground ball to get out of trouble, remember that God is always there for us in our time of need and trouble. We can always rely on the One who is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. God will be with us and our fortress to defeat times of trouble. Isn't that a great thing to remember?

Visual aid: Give the baseball to a pitcher and have him show his two seam grip

Baseball Team Devotion- Web Gems

Scripture Lesson: 1Samuel 17(whole chapter) especially verses 41-51

ESPN has coined a phrase that means great glove work or defensive plays. These plays are now known around the baseball world as "web gems". The original term came up in a production meeting for the popular ESPN baseball show, *Baseball tonight*. Then producer Judson Burch came up with the term used to describe a great defensive play. You can even hear the term watching your local Little League team play when a player makes a great defensive play. One has to flash the leather to get a web gem. It takes confidence in one's ability and courage to try to make the play. Instincts take over often times and we are able to see the great plays being made. When is the last time you flashed the leather? Have you ever made a web gem?

In our Scripture lesson today, I believe we have the first instance of a web gem in recorded history. For the shepherd boy David flashed some serious leather in defeating the Giant Goliath. But we are ahead of the story. David had brought food to his older brothers fighting against the Philistines. The Philistines had a champion who day after day not only belittled the Israelite army, he belittled God. David heard this giant and went to Saul and said I'll take him on! David with only a leather slingshot and a few river stones went to meet the giant Goliath in battle. Not only that, he engaged in a little trash talk (vs 45-47). David's aim is true and he kills the Goliath by flashing the leather slingshot, thus getting the first recorded web gem. David's confidence was in the Lord. He believed God would win the battle and he had the courage and the faith to step out when no one else would and defeat Goliath. I think Paul said it best in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Him who gives me strength." If we will place our faith and confidence in God, who knows what kind of heavenly web gem we can accomplish for Him. God is just waiting for us to believe in Him and follow Him. He wants to accomplish great things for His Kingdom through us. How about it are we ready to flash the leather of faith and get a heavenly web gem?

Visual aid: Great you tube video on top 10 High School web gems

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QH2n0SPX9FA><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QH2n0SPX9FA><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QH2n0SPX9FA>