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Many young athletes have a dream of playing sport at a high level, but how do we get there? Beyond having the dream, success in sport is determined by:

- 1. Physical characteristics**
- 2. Technical skills**
- 3. Tactical abilities**
- 4. Mental toughness**
- 5. Hard work**
- 6. Competitive challenges**
- 7. Good coaching**

Physical characteristics

There are controllable and uncontrollable physical characteristics. For example, height is mainly determined by your genes and uncontrollable. If you want to know how tall you are going to be, the scientists have come up with a pretty accurate formula to predict how tall you will be:

$[(\text{Mom's height} + \text{Dad's height}) / 2\text{-inches}] + 2.5\text{-inches} =$
Your predicted adult height $\pm 4\text{-inches}$.

Example: $[(5'4" \text{ or } 64" + 6'1" \text{ or } 73")/2] + 2.5" = 71" \pm 4" =$
67" – 75" or between 5'7" and 6'3".

Even though your height is pretty much determined by your genes, there is evidence that prior to puberty, if you don't get enough nutrition, exercise, and a sufficient quantity and quality of sleep, you may not grow to your genetically predetermined height. So be sure to get enough rest, have a good diet, and exercise.

As for weight, do not worry too much about it when you are young. Although you can control your weight more than your height, you can only do so within a relatively small range. So, just follow the same advice for height (i.e., get enough sleep, eat right, and exercise).

In addition, because most physical characteristics are outside of your control, especially when you have not reached puberty or physical maturity, you should be focusing on what you can control, which include technical, tactical, and mental skills, instead of trying to get bigger and stronger. Thus, this camp will focus solely on those three skills.

Technical skills

Technical skills refer to the skills and movements that are necessary for optimizing your performance. In baseball, such skills include:

- 1. Throwing skills**
- 2. Fielding skills**
- 3. Hitting skills**
- 4. Running skills**

I work on these skills through one-on-one private lessons and the summer camps.

Tactical skills

Tactical skills refer to the “game IQ” that allows you to make situationally-appropriate plays. In other words, they are the mental skills to help you become aware of what is going on during the game and knowing what you have to do to make necessary plays. For example, as a hitter, when the runner is on the 1st base with no out and the coach gives you the hit and run sign, what should you do? What if you are the 2nd baseman in the same situation? Also, as a hitter, what pitches should you wait for in 3-1 count? How about as a pitcher? To be a good ball player, your baseball IQ needs to be high and this is something you can control and be taught and improved.

Mental toughness

Mental toughness refers to the mental characteristics of an athlete who refuses to let distraction, stress, and/or bad luck get to them. As a baseball player, there are many things that can distract you, stress you out, and upset you because things didn’t go the way you wanted. All of these things can prevent you from playing your best. For example, you may get distracted by the smell of hamburgers being cooked right next to the field; you may get stressed out by playing in front of many spectators or coaches, and parents; the opponent team yelling at you when you are ready to bat; or the ump called strike on a pitch when you thought it was ball. Mentally tough ball players are able to focus their attention on what they need to do to perform at their optimal level despite all of those “noises.” They know that everyone including professional athletes make mistakes or suffer from poor performance, but they are eager to learn from them, interpret them in a way

that will energize and motivate them to improve rather than dwelling in the past mistakes and complains. Remember, there are many troubling, painful, unpleasant, and worrisome things in life. When you face such predicaments, you have two options. You can complain, blame the environment and be defeated. Some may express sympathy for you, but ultimately, you are the one to lose out, and anything you say will really be just an excuse. The second option is to live with an invincible spirit, blazing your own way regardless of your environment. The choice is up to you. This kind of mentally tough mindset is something you can control and improve.

Hard work

I am a true believer of “hard work pays off!” The responsibility to get better every day is completely your own. You have to be willing to put in hours of practice outside of team practice. This means you have to be willing to make sacrifices necessary to improve your physical strength and technical and tactical abilities. Working hard also means to set SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time-bound goals. There are many categories of goals you can set using the SMART principle (e.g., process, performance, outcome goals, short vs. long range goals, individual vs. team goals, etc. etc.).

For example, a SMART goal for a baseball player could be “Hitting line drives in the cage at least 8 times out of 10 pitches by the coach within one week!” This goal is specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, and time-bound. A not-so-SMART goal is “Hit better.” This goal is not specific enough, not being measured objectively, no specific action plans, not realistic, and not

time-bound. Remember, "Perfect practice makes perfect performance possible!"

As a great example of how to set SMART goals, I will share the "Goal Matrix" used by Shohei Ohtani when he was 16 years old. Be flexible and willing to make adjustments to the goals if necessary. And set up a reward system with your parents as many athletes are not motivated to work hard every day unless there is some tangible benefit attached to accomplishing each sub-goal.

Competitive challenges

To get better, it's imperative that you experience lots of competitive challenges. In that sense, the more actual games you play, the better you get. However, there is a secret to get the most out of competitive challenges. The science of motivation is clear on the fact that people's motivation level becomes optimal when a challenge or task at hand is not too easy or too difficult. So, the key is to compete against another team that is intermediately difficult or at least the opponent team is at the same level as your team.

Similarly, during practice, you do not want to set a goal for a certain technical or tactical skill that is too difficult or too easy (e.g., if you are hitting line drives 3 out of 10 pitches in the cage, then set your next goal at 5, not 10). I will incorporate lots of these intermediately difficult challenges throughout the camps to make it challenging but not too challenging.

Good coaching

There are many private coaches in town to whom you can go to get lessons. But, not all coaches do what I do. As a sports psychologist and college professor who interacts with many young minds on a daily basis, I know a lot about how to encourage and nurture young people to perform at their best. Also, with my extensive experience in playing baseball at a higher level in Japan, having managed little league teams for 7 years and led two All Stars teams to the California State Championship tournament in 2016 and 2017, as well as having established a solid client base for my private lessons for young players only through word-of-mouth, I not only know how to coach, but more importantly have a solid track-record of producing optimal results for every client.