



The *Mental Game* Timekeeper

For those who have played the great game of baseball, we know impactful the mental game is. We can go 4 for 4 today, and 0 for 4 tomorrow, or vice-versa, and have no idea why. If we make a good play, we may get into the “zone” and play out-of-our-heads, feeling like we are the king of the world and there is no ball that can get hit past us for the rest of the game. Or, we can make a small mistake that cascades into several more, and we question if we should even be on the field at that level of play. The mental aspect of baseball has likely ended far more initially promising careers than it has helped flourish. It’s all too tempting to blame the umpire, teammates, the sun in the sky or the cleats on our feet. When we’re off the field, we may have the intent to see the game with a growth mindset and write “excuses are the enemy of improvement” on a notecard to put in our back pocket but struggle to dig ourselves out of the spiral of self-doubt and negative self-talk once we step between the lines and the first pitch is thrown.

I’ve struggled to both personally apply and coach the mental aspects throughout my playing and coaching careers. I was also fortunate to have the rare opportunity to sit one-on-one and listen to a brilliant man every week, who happened to also be a team psychologist for the Seattle Mariners. I got an undergraduate degree in Psychology, took graduate coursework in Sport Psychology, read from the teachings of both historical legendary players and contemporary starts to understand the mental aspect of the game. I have studied best practice leadership techniques, read stacks of peer-reviewed journals and spent 5 years coaching with a Washington Coach of the Year award winner.

Despite my academic résumé and coaching experience, there are no words or methods I've found in the world that can compare to the example of the *Mental Game Timekeeper*, and how impactful that was for the optimal mental approach to the game in 2022. Every time Wyatt stepped on the field, he had his emotions on his sleeve, and a beaming smile on his face. He was a team manager that worked with the JV team I was coaching at Tahoma High School in Maple Valley, Washington. There was never a doubt that Wyatt was excited to be there and help the team in any way that he could.

When a player made an error, or struck out, Wyatt didn't hide his emotions. He had visible disappointment, often with an "oh no". His negative reactions were almost exactly three seconds each, and not directed toward anyone. It was about team, and about the game. Most importantly, it takes more than three seconds between strike three and a disappointed high schooler to walk back to the dugout. By the time they walked back through the dugout door, Wyatt was there to greet them, with a pat on the shoulder and encouragement that they'll get it next time. Wyatt never blamed, never complained, never whined, and never, ever, let a negative emotion linger. 3 seconds.

I absolutely wish that I could replicate the authentic release of emotions for 3 seconds, then return to team encouragement and optimism that Wyatt demonstrated. I'm not as good. I wish I could coach our players how to be disappointed for a maximum of 3 seconds, then focus on getting better for the next play, never letting mistakes linger or get routed to the toxins of blame or excuses. I'm not that good. There is no substitute for the sincerity of what is innately part of someone's character. I will never have the skill to set the 3 second tempo like Wyatt is able to do.

Wyatt has Down's Syndrome. Wyatt is all heart, and all about *team*. The Mental Game Timekeeper is clearly a specialty for him. He has mastered that specialty, in fact, far better than any player I've ever coached or played along side with. We had a great season that year, and Wyatt was a huge part of it. He rallied for the boys, and they rallied around him. His love for the team and being part of that season was contagious. It had a ripple-effect, [which also brought life to the Tahoma High School football team prior to their homecoming game.](#)



Too often, we think about *accommodations* and *modifications* for our neurodivergent learners. Those things are important, but we run the risk of missing the gifts that are inside. Wyatt's gift of innate skill as an elite *Mental Game Timekeeper* was not missed. On the contrary, it was very much appreciated by the players and myself. Too often, we get caught-up in our daily lives and tasks and overlook the gifts beneath the surface for many around us and even within ourselves.

A commonality that has stood out in siblings I've met of many neurodivergent learners I've worked with is a deeper compassion, combined with deeper strength and deeper peace. There must be so much more to see that lies ahead.

AN **ALLIED ASCENSION** APPRECIATION STORY