



The Excuse Terminator

When he showed up to practice, I knew Leach was a three-sport athlete. He had the ballplayer swag where every aspect of his fit was personalized. He was always the first one on the field and the last one off of the field. The total number of excuses I heard from him the years that I coached him was zero. The sum total of the number of times I saw a negative body expression from him in the years that I coached him was zero. The total number of times I didn't see him dive for a ball that was somewhat close was zero. The number of times I didn't see him run out a ground ball, or even a popup, was zero.

I've been blessed to coach some amazing youth over the years. The player I have to rank second on the list of the "Excuse Terminator" was also someone who was the first on the field, and last off of it, and would immediately rush to the shed to grab a rake if something needed extra attention. I didn't hear a single excuse, see one incident of bad body language, hear a single excuse or a single negative syllable spoken about a teammate. It's hard consider him second place, because it's more of a genetics situation that he isn't first on the list. In second place is a player I worried I'd killed when I was tossing BP in the cage and we were working on the squeeze bunt. I reminded players that they needed to wait for the pitcher's front foot to land before squaring around, or the pitcher will throw at their head, so they duck and it's an easy pull-down tag for the catcher on the guy coming home. In my defense, I'm five foot nothing with T-Rex arms, and never threw very hard on my best day in my prime. And, in the cage, it was way less. Ishi squared early though. And, as warned, the ball was thrown toward his head. There was plenty of time to get out of the way of my 40 mph throw, but I think it caught him off guard. The ball looked like it was in slow-motion, and tractor-beamed right into his Adam's Apple. He was a lanky sophomore, and his Adam's Apple was a relatively high percentage of his body at that time, although he'd fill out that frame with about 80 pounds of muscle in the following two years. He went down like a rag doll. I was worried that I broke his Adam's Apple and killed him. I didn't, and he ended up hitting a walk-off tank to send the San Francisco Giants to the World Series years later.

The genetic advantage that B-Leach had to rank him above Ishi on that list is that he's a little person. He figured out how to read batters to make up for limited range at second base, to get himself in the best possible fielding position. He learned how to hit to all fields, so he could be as effective as humanly possible to hit the ball where there was the biggest gap in the defense. He was our most effective pitcher on Varsity one year, painting corners with a unique delivery angle, inducing players to get off-balance and pop the ball up, consistently for twice through the batting order. His success empowered this humble young celebrity to be [featured in ESPN's Rise magazine](#).

With B-Leach on the squad, player excuses were shot down within seconds. If someone cried around about balls and strikes and mistakenly thought I'd be interested in an explanation, I'd respond with something like "sorry, I need to



focus on this pitcher's pitch selection, maybe B-Leach is interested in your explanation". POW. Excuse down. If a player wanted to complain to me about ball-strike calls, I'd say "why don't you ask Leach how he's able to adjust?"

KA-BOOM. Tantrum over. After a couple of weeks of responding to every whine or tantrum with a suggestion to consult B-Leach, we were able to extinguish pity-parties from the dugout for the rest of the season. It was beautiful.