
EDITORIAL

Baseball wisdom applied to urology

Many surgeons played baseball in an organized league or informally as children or teenagers. You sometimes find wisdom in unexpected places, but in retrospect, I think there are lessons learned playing baseball as a youngster that are easily transferable to urologic practice. I think several quotes from some famous baseball players are directly applicable to surgery.

“Luck is the residue of design” was uttered by Branch Rickey. Rickey was a mediocre baseball player at Ohio Wesleyan, but went on to have a long career in baseball as a front office executive and general manager. He is credited with breaking the color-barrier in baseball when he brought Jackie Robinson up to the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. He is also credited with introducing the batting cage, pitching machines and batting helmets to the sport. He realized that “luck” only occurred as a result of planning and attention to detail, as it does in surgery.

“Don’t look back, something may be gaining on you.” These were the words of Satchel Paige, a legendary pitcher in the Negro Leagues who broke into the Major Leagues at age 42 for the Cleveland Indians. He played his last professional game in the majors at age 59 which remains a record. He endured much discrimination in both the Negro and Major Leagues, but this quote demonstrates that he never held grudges, he moved on. That is good advice for surgeons. We also suffer injustices, but it is better to move on to the next task at hand.

No review of baseball wisdom would be complete without a few quotes from Yogi Berra who once said, “You can observe a lot just by watching”. Keen observation is the underpinning of surgical practice. We observe our patients, where subtle signs can often unmask underlying disease. Also, any surgeon will tell you that observing other surgeons in the operating room will often refine your own technique.

“The future ain’t what it used to be” was another Yogism. This quote’s application to surgery is obvious. As surgeons, we are always looking to the future; the next innovation, the next ‘big thing’. In the past, I’ve written that the goal of all of us should be to render ourselves obsolete.¹

“Every day is a new opportunity” was a favorite phrase of ‘Bullet’ Bob Feller who pitched for the Cleveland Indians from 1936 to 1956. His fastball was measured at 98.6 mph in an era when the average fastball was between 80 to 90 mph and only a few pitchers could reach 95 mph. Feller was talented, but beyond that he was a confident optimist. I think to be a good surgeon, you have to be both confident and optimistic. There is an old bromide that goes, “I don’t want a surgeon or an airline pilot who isn’t confident.”

“All I want out of life is that when I walk down the street, fellas will say, ‘There goes the greatest hitter who ever lived’” are the words of Ted Williams. Some may consider that hubris, but that type of ambition is a characteristic of many surgeons. Every one of us should strive to be “the best who ever was”.

So there you have it, the starting line up of baseball wisdom. There is one more similarity between baseball and surgery. Most baseball players love what they do. So do we!

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References

1. Loughlin KR. Relentlessly make yourself obsolete. Robot-assisted radical cystectomy, the emerging standard of care. *Urol Oncol* 2021;39(1):13–14.