



MENTAL GAME



Featuring:



Ken Ravizza

Legendary Performance Trainer and Author of *Heads-Up Baseball*

Meet Ken Ravizza

What is the Mental Game?

Ravizza: The mental game is part of it. It's not the whole thing. You've got to have a certain amount of talent and you definitely have to do the work and the preparation. There's nothing magical about it, but you have to pay your dues and work hard to get yourself where you need to be. The mental game is like frosting on the cake. The mental game may be just 2% of it, but that 2% can make a difference.

***Heads-Up Baseball* is one of the greatest baseball psychology books ever written and has been referenced by so many of the sport psychologists and performance coaches throughout the *Mental Game VIP* program. Thank you for all of the great work that you have done and continue to do in the game of baseball... but rumors are building that *Heads-Up Baseball 2.0* is in the works! What can the baseball community expect to learn when that is released?**

Ravizza: Basically, I've been working on that the last two years with Tom Hanson and it's been fascinating looking at the changes that have taken place from when we did the first book. I think the first book was, I wouldn't necessarily agree with the greatest book of all time in baseball, but it was a solid book and it took me 25 years of working with athletes before I wrote the first book. I know today a lot of people work two weeks and they're writing a book, but that was very helpful to learn from all those coaches and athletes and get that information and put it out there.

I don't think there really was a lot of new stuff in *Heads-Up Baseball*, but it was a pulling together of things where it provided a structure and a framework for coaches. I think coaches have been doing the mental game throughout their coaching career, but what we did in *Heads-Up Baseball* was provide a structure and a framework where this related to that and they can see that. So many coaches said, "I'm already doing it," and I even, when I do clinics, really hammer them with, "You're already doing this stuff, you know?" It's not like this mental game is something new and revolutionary. Good coaches coach the mental game.

Heads-Up Baseball 2 was after 20 years from writing the first book really looking at what's changed. What has changed is the environment that athletes are brought up in. We were talking about this in spring training. Many of our US players have never had a summer job. Many kids in high school today don't have a summer job. Someone comes and cuts the lawn. They don't do it. They don't have these jobs where you learn a lot about responsibility and sometimes going to work when you don't want to go to work. It's a different young person that we're dealing with today. Being a university professor for the last 41 years, I really see how the students have changed and it is dramatic. The whole social media

aspect that the young kids are dealing with is that they want everything quick. They want the instant gratification. They want the quick fix and one of the difficulties with sport is, and it's not just baseball, but sport is analog in a digital world, meaning there's no way around it. You have to pay your dues and you have to do the work. You have to go through the blood, sweat, and tears. There's absolutely nothing magical that's going to help you dominate over anyone. It's going to be a struggle, it's going to be a battle and that takes hard work, so when we say hard work, if you've never had a job, you don't know what hard work is. Now, the athletes that have had to work, they have an advantage, no question.

The thing *Heads-Up Baseball 2* is really looking at is what are the pitfalls in the mental game. When you get an athlete, that I would say, is 'too internal', they're focused too much on routines, too much on the at-bat and they're not competing. Where they get what we call 'too internal' is a mistake. Another one is they do their routines, but there's no meaning in the routine and that becomes an issue. Also with the athlete today, I'm learning from the college teams, we have to talk about how you compete. In this age of specialization and showcasing, it's more about showcasing your skills than it is competing and being on a team. Being on a team is critical, because when you're on a team, you're not just a one-man band taking care of you. You're supporting your teammates and that, ironically, helps you get your head out of your rear end and support somebody else.

Young kids today don't play Wiffle ball and they don't do sandlot. So at the college level we have to teach kids how to compete, because they know how to showcase but 'How do I compete when the pressure is on?' That's a whole other thing besides just showcasing my skills.

The final part in *Heads-Up Baseball 2*, besides the competing and being on a team, would be the issue of a really old school thought and that is knowing yourself, knowing yourself as a ball player, knowing what your strengths are, knowing what your weaknesses are, knowing how to use your experience and learn from it. That's basically where *Heads-Up Baseball 2* is going.

As a former sport psychology professor at Cal State Fullerton, do you have any tips for students?

Ravizza: Enjoy what you're doing and realize it isn't going to be easy. Learn to compensate, adjust and keep moving forward. I think that's very important. I think learning how to spend time by yourself alone, without the cell phone, without the computer, without all the stuff, but just being able to sit and be with yourself and start looking at your own personal experience in the world that you're in.

How have the best players you have coached learned to slow the game down in 'pressure' situations?

Ravizza: It's a skill that you have to work with and it's not like you learn it one time and you have it. For those of you reading that follow the World Cup, you saw that Brazil team that had some of the best

soccer players in the world on it. When Germany scored the second goal on them, you could see the fear and panic look in their eyes. One thing I've learned over my years of doing this is that confidence is fragile. I think we build up this false bravado that 'I'm the man, I'm going to dominate, I'm the guy,' which is a joke and it's so superficial that it's ridiculous to me. What the athlete has to learn is how to compensate and adjust, how to learn to be uncomfortable, how to learn to bounce back from adversity, and how to learn from their failures and not be so damn preoccupied with having to feel just right to perform well, but instead learn to have good crappy days.

If you were a coach, how would you create pressure situations in practice?

Ravizza: I think the way that you would create them in practice is explain to them what you're trying to do and really be clear what that is, so they understand. During BP, instead of taking 15 pitches, cut down the number of pitches and increase the quality of the pitches. This is where situational hitting is good. You've got to practice being on-deck, you've got to practice slowly getting in there, you've got to practice working it, and during BP practice stepping out. For the coaches that are reading, you try to make practice more game like, meaning like when you're doing a bullpen, do bullpens in pairs, where one guy works it, the other guy sits. He makes about 15-17 pitches, then he sits and the other guy gets up. Then he goes 17 and the other guy sits, because that's what you do in the game. Now, are there bullpens where you want to work quick, are there bullpens where you want to take your 50-60 pitches? Yes, but you've also got to practice game like situations. With teams that I work with at the college level, we practice making errors. We practice what we're going to do after we make an error and that's stuff that I've learned from coaches like Dave Snow and Mike Weathers.

One thing I've got to be real clear on in all of this is that I've just had the privilege of being around great coaches, such as Augie Garrido, Marcel Lachemann, Joe Maddon, and Mike Scioscia. You just learn from these people and that's just so important.

What aspect of sports psychology do you find the most difficult to teach?

Ravizza: I get excited by all of it. I mean the more challenges, the better. I still get excited about the challenges that come your way. I think the thing I run into the most is that the athletes can be very hard on themselves and the need to forgive themselves and move forward. I think that's the hard thing, especially for the perfectionist athlete, who just gets so hard on himself. Sometimes, they've got to learn to just step back and laugh a little bit.

Million Dollar Question

What do you know now that you wish you knew then?

Ravizza: Great question. I think I learned it real early in my teaching career as a university professor. When I first started, I was trying to be like everybody else and I was overwhelmed, because I was inadequate and I wasn't good enough. About my sixth month into teaching, I finally came to a conclusion after not enjoying trying to be like everyone else. I was listening to a song by Neil Young, where he was talking about you've got to be yourself, not like everyone else. That really resonated with me. It was at that time that I stopped trying to be like everyone else and started to do what I do and that was the first thing that jumped out at me. There's so many levels to that which are so important.

The second thing that's been very important is that as teachers and coaches we give so much to other people that it becomes important that you've got to do some of those things for yourself and take care of yourself as you're doing the work with others. That's very, very important. I can't emphasize that enough and that's something that I constantly have to deal with. At my desk at home, I have a little sign that says, 'Take care of me.' Sometimes I'm so busy taking care of everyone else. The caring is important, but you've also got to take care of yourself.

Hot Seat

Positive Energy: Use what you've got. Sometimes it's not positive. Sometimes it's have a good shitty day.

Confidence: Fragile.

Championship Culture: Who knows? Clueless. I have no idea what champions do. I've seen it done so many different ways. There's no one way to do it.

Routines: Consistency. Something to go to when the garbage hits the fan and the garbage will hit the fan.

Process: Keep the process greater than the outcome. It's all about outcomes, but you've got to stay on the process. It's real clear to me that people bring me in to work with them for one reason and that is to win. Let's be real clear about that, but to win, you've got to focus on the process and do what you do. You can't do more. I finished my ninth Olympic Games with Russia. Recipe for failure in the Olympics is go to the Olympics and try to do the best you've ever done. It's not going to work. You've got to go to the Olympics, or the biggest competition, and you've got to do what you do. You don't have to bring it up a level, because if you've got to bring it up a level, man, you were shortchanging yourself before. You got cracks in your armor and you're going to be found out.

Controllables: Got to make sure you focus on them, because there's very little you have control of. You've only got control of yourself, your attitude, your effort and your focus. Other than that, you'll get swallowed up in things if you don't focus on the controllables.

Mind-Body Connection: Mind, body, spirit, emotion. It's what being is about and they're all related. You've got to have the spirit as well, and by spirit I mean the purpose and the passion for what you're doing. It becomes critical, no question.

Success: Success is controlling the controllables and doing everything you can. I had one World Cup athlete I worked with and he responded to me after his final game in Brazil. He said, "Ken, I did everything I could, I played to the best of my ability." That's fantastic, man. That's fantastic.

Failure: Failure is positive feedback, information, stuff for you to learn from.

Omaha: Do what you do.

The Closer

Any further advice for the baseball players and coaches striving to get to the next level?

Ravizza: I think the biggest thing is listen to your heart and know why you're doing what you're doing. The other thing is embrace what you're doing and don't get hung up on what you want to do down the road. For a lot of the coaches or people in sports psych, you may not be working at the level you want to be working, but the level you're working at is where you need to be. Totally immerse yourself in it. If you're not coaching, get out and coach. Volunteer, go to the inner-city, go to your community. Get out and coach and work with kids. You can't learn this stuff on the computer, you can't learn this stuff from books, and you can't learn this stuff by just taking in information. You have to go out and you have to work with people and pay your dues. Old school.

