

Take Responsibility

One of the first steps in the maturation of a young athlete is the ability to take responsibility for their own actions, preparation, and anything within their control. An immature athlete will always find ways to shift blame to other people or conditions and away from themselves for their own failures.

A mature athlete will accept and embrace difficult conditions and find ways to adapt. They will learn from how the change in conditions impacts their approach. They see that their response — their ability to take responsibility — has a positive impact on their results as well as on their teammates.

As you read through this, much of it can be applied to coaches and parents as well, but the primary focus is on players. It's time to stop blaming everyone and everything else. It's time to take responsibility.

Stop blaming...

1. Umpires

Umpires aren't perfect. They're far from it. They will make mistakes, you can count on that. But they're also not particularly well compensated, and they take a ton of abuse. Personally, I'd never be an umpire. It's a thankless job.

Expect some calls to be wrong. Expect that you will disagree with some calls. As a player, this is nothing to get mad at. It will be part of the game.

Instead of blaming the umpire for an out call on your infield grounder, ask yourself: ***Did I do everything I could to make this an easier call for the umpire?*** Because if you hesitated AT ALL, much of the blame should be put on you.

When it comes to plays in the field for an offense, you want to make all safe calls obvious to an umpire. Anything that is close becomes a 50/50 proposition and you're leaving it up to the umpire gods. Do all you can to avoid that situation.

There is not a set strike zone. Some umpires will call high, some low, some wide, some tight, and some unpredictable. Get a quick sense of what the umpire calls and doesn't call. Then use that to your advantage.

Instead, a player who refuses to accept responsibility assumes a set strike zone. They disagree with a call and refuse to adjust. After that called third strike in the first at bat, will you adjust? Or will the same thing happen again?

If an umpire's strike zone is wide or unpredictable, you need to do what you can as a hitter to take the third strike call out of his hands. Be more aggressive. Stop blaming the umpire.

2. Weather Conditions

Weather conditions can and will play havoc on a baseball player. The Spiders have already dealt with all of these this season...

Too Cold: It's not easy playing in the cold. Your hands may be numb. The bat vibrates. Make sure that you dress for the occasion and keep yourself warm.

Too Hot: Heat can be a baseball player's worst enemy. It can result in dehydration and a lack of energy. Stay hydrated and stay cool, when possible.

Rain: The ball will be wet. The bat will be wet. YOU will be wet. How will you adjust? Or will you simply make more mistakes and complain about it?

Wind: Which way is the wind blowing? How will it impact fly balls and popups? Will you be able to adjust? Will you help your teammates if the ball blows away from them?

Sun: It seems so simple, but the sun can make things incredibly difficult for the best of defenders. What are typically routine fly balls and popups become an adventure. Will you wear sunglasses? Shield the sun with your glove? Take another angle? Will you help point out the ball for your teammates if you see it?

The reality: Weather conditions are rarely perfect. Deal with it. The other team plays with the same conditions. Your job is to handle those conditions better than they do.

For the Spiders, we'll discuss the weather conditions once prior to the game. We'll talk about how it impacts what we need to do. I'll

present it as a challenge for us to overcome. But it will not be something that kids will talk about, complain about, or blame during the game.

3. Field Conditions

Some outfields are bumpy and hilly. Some slope down. The grass is long and thick on some outfields, short and pristine on others.

Some infields are well manicured. The dirt has been dragged. It's flat and free of rocks, leading to true hops. Other infields are like playing on a gravel driveway. You have no idea where the ball is going to go.

Guess what? Both teams deal with this. How will you handle it? Will you see it as a challenge? Will you learn what you need to do to adjust? Or will you simply complain and make excuses?

4. Teammates

Your teammate didn't execute. He struck out or made a bad throw or couldn't catch the ball or can't find the strike zone on the mound.

Your reaction? Frustration. Blaming him for runs scored. Blaming him for putting your team in a hole.

Think about this the next time you make a mistake. It will happen. Will your teammates blame you? Will you accept that responsibility?

Don't create a toxic environment. Blaming teammates helps no one. They made a bad throw, but did you do all you could to catch it? Or are you just making sure others realize that it wasn't entirely your fault? They didn't make the catch, but were you there to back them up?

Baseball is a mental game. You can't do anything about the mistake that was already made. Support the teammate who is down to help make sure he can make the play next time. Help your teammate understand responsibilities if he wasn't in the right place.

Everyone makes mistakes. Minimizing the impact of mistakes is EVERYONE'S responsibility.

5. Coaches

You're the runner at second. A line drive single is hit to right, and you head to third. Your coach sends you home, and you're out on a close play.

"COACH SENT ME!" You throw your arms out in exasperation. ***"IT'S NOT MY FAULT!"***

The coach certainly carries responsibility regarding everything that happens on the field. But is the blame for him alone?

You must ask yourself: Did I get the best lead that I could? Did I get the best jump? What kind of angle did I take around third? Did I hesitate? Did I ever slow down? Could I have taken a better slide?

Whenever something doesn't lead to positive results, you have to think about whether you did everything within your power to avoid that situation. If you didn't, what will you do differently next time?

By simply blaming the coach, nothing will change. You'll do everything the same way you did last time over and over again.

My goal as a coach is to get to the point where I'm mostly standing on third looking pretty. I want you to anticipate and react to the game around you. If you are constantly waiting for instruction from me, you will always be a step or two behind.

6. Parents

"My dad got me here late."

Okay. I get it. You aren't 16. You don't drive. You were late this time. But what about if you're late repeatedly? What are you doing to make sure that it doesn't happen again?

Stress to your dad that you need to get here earlier. Tell him that you need to leave 15 minutes earlier than the schedule states. It's ultimately your responsibility to get here on time.

I can't bench your dad. But I can bench you. It may seem unfair, but you do have some say over when you get to practice and games.

Chances are that it's not your dad's fault anyway. Chances are that you waited until the last minute to get ready (it happens in my house!). Take responsibility and do things differently next time.

Be a Leader

Those who accept responsibility — and vocally — are leaders that every team needs. This goes for players and coaches alike. If you realize that you could have done something differently, face up to it. And if it's something that others can learn from, let them know.

Those who are constantly blaming other people and conditions for their poor results will cultivate a toxic environment. Their noise provides no value. Instead, it provides negative value that will only lead to more poor results.