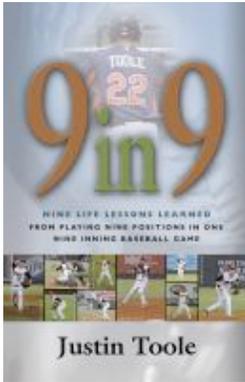


9 in 9

**NINE LIFE LESSONS LEARNED
FROM PLAYING NINE POSITIONS IN ONE
NINE INNING BASEBALL GAME**



Justin Toole



On August 25th, 2012, author Justin Toole got the opportunity to play all nine positions in one nine inning Minor League baseball game. This book tells the story of that game and each chapter talks about a different position he played that night. Within each chapter, you will find a different life lesson that he has learned while playing baseball. Nine positions in one nine inning game - nine life lessons he's learned through playing the game of baseball.

9 in 9

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First Edition

Chapter 1
Patience

“He that can have patience can have what he will.”
- Benjamin Franklin

“The two most powerful warriors are patience and time.”
- Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy



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The day I had long waited for was finally here. At the beginning of the season my manager, Edwin Rodriguez, told me that if I hadn't moved up and was still with his team at the end of the season, I would get a chance to play 9 different positions in one 9 inning game. Being a utility guy, I thought that would be pretty cool, but I didn't really think too much of it other than that. If I was around at the end of the season I'd worry about it when that time came, but until then I had some work to do.

As the season went along I found myself on a few different teams within the organization. I was called up to AAA Columbus early in the season and then again for a short stint in the middle of the season. On both occasions I returned back to High-A Carolina. I was also called up to AA Akron for what I figured to be the rest of the season in late July only to return back to Carolina a few weeks later in the middle of August. Everyone's goal in the minor leagues is to make it to the Major Leagues, so each time you move up you're really excited, but then when you get sent down it can be really tough. I looked at both getting called up and getting sent back as opportunities. Now that I was back in Carolina, I had an opportunity to accomplish something not many people at the professional level ever have the chance to do.

Pre-game was normal like always, except for my pre-game interview with our radio guy, Darren Headrick. The interview was to be played on the video board before the start of the game. The interview gave fans a heads up as to what was going to happen in the game. At the same time, I was able to let my thoughts and feelings out about how I thought the game was going to go. To be honest I don't know what was better, the questions Darren asked or the answers I gave him. This interview completely set the tone for me on this night. I knew it was going to be enjoyable not only for me, but for my teammates, everyone involved with the Carolina Mudcats, everyone involved with the Cleveland Indians, as well as all of the fans in attendance. I was definitely excited and ready to enjoy the experience.

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The game started out just like any other game on any other ordinary evening. It was a typical Saturday night in Zebulon, North Carolina. The stands were filling up and there was a touch of fall in the air. On this night we were to take the field at Five County Stadium and square off against the Boston Red Sox Carolina League Affiliate, the Salem Red Sox. As the starting lineups were introduced, I took my place towards the top step of the dugout, eagerly waiting to take the field. As I was announced, hitting in the two spot, I took off from the dugout and made my way toward the middle of the diamond, toward my regularly played positions on the infield dirt. Everything was normal, except this time I didn't stop on the dirt. I continued into center field and took my spot for the National Anthem as the starting rightfielder for the Carolina Mudcats.

I warmed up throwing with our centerfielder, Delvi Cid, and my thoughts and emotions were racing. You name an emotion and I probably had it. I really didn't have much in terms of expectations heading into the night, but there were a few things I wanted to accomplish. I wanted to get a hit, I wanted to play good defense without committing an error, and most of all I wanted to win the game. I couldn't wait to call my parents, friends, and everybody else and tell them about all the cool things that had happened in the game. I didn't want to get ahead of myself, but I also couldn't wait to get the show on the road. If there was ever a time in my life I needed a little patience it was now. Throughout my life and my baseball career my patience has been tested quite a bit (probably too many times to be honest). As a result, I learned that a little patience can go a long way.

Not being an everyday outfielder, I didn't have my own outfielder's glove. In past years I always borrowed one from a teammate who I replaced in the lineup or from someone who had an extra one. In baseball, each person breaks in their own glove in a different way, and so it's sometimes kind of tricky to find one that you can use and are also comfortable with at the same time. I've been fortunate enough to have teammates like Donnie Webb, Tyler Holt, and on this particular night, Todd Hankins, who have at one time or another let me use their glove. Lucky for me, Todd was playing in the

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infield when I was in the outfield tonight, so I was able to use his outfield glove for the first three innings. To top it all off, it was a red and black Carolina Mudcats themed glove, so obviously I had to use it!

The first inning started well. The first hitter for Salem, Lucas LeBlanc, popped out to our first baseman Tyler Cannon. The next hitter, James Kang, singled up the middle. Michael Almanzar followed with a hard hit ball that was snagged by Hankins at third base. There were two outs and Kang was on first base when Brandon Jacobs struck out to end the inning. Just like that, the top of the first was over. I thought it would be cool to make a play at each position, but the top of the first quickly squashed any hopes of that. After the last out, I made my way back to our home dugout, located on the third base line. For those of you who are unfamiliar with baseball, the right field to third base dugout run and the left field to first base dugout run are the absolute worst. I don't think you will ever find an outfielder who would ever tell you he enjoyed doing either of those runs. Luckily for me I only had to do it once.

Standing in right field during the top half of the first inning and not getting any action allowed time for my mind to race with all kinds of thoughts and emotions. I was so anxious for the night to be over and for the game to be finished. I wished I could do something to speed the game up, but I realized I didn't actually have much control over how fast the game would go. Baseball is a grind with games usually lasting several hours. I just hoped that tonight's game would be a quick one.

Having played baseball for many years, I have experienced quick games, like pitching in a seven inning pitcher's duel in high school against Carroll Kuemper, a game that lasted just a little over an hour. I have also experienced long games, like the grind that is playing the entire game at third base in a twenty-three inning, six hour and twenty-seven minute game in Kinston, North Carolina in 2011. For the record, we were victorious in that game, 3-2, against the Texas Rangers Affiliate, the Myrtle Beach Pelicans. Although I had many years of baseball playing experience, I still needed patience and a deep breath to make it through this night.

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Patience is something that I have never really had in my life. Anyone who knows me personally knows that I am an immediate results kind of person, even when it's probably not even reasonable. I was the kid growing up who when you gave me something to do, I focused on the end result, the whole thing being done, and would do it as fast as I possibly could. It didn't matter how I got to the end of what I was doing as long as I was the first one to do so. I was "that" kid growing up. It wasn't until I got older that I realized life is not about the outcome, but rather it's about the process. I couldn't always get the results I desired overnight. Whether it was on the soccer field, the basketball court, the football field, the baseball diamond, or the classroom, I had to have patience. Tonight was no different; I couldn't just focus on the end result of playing all nine positions in nine innings. Instead, I had to have patience and focus on playing the game one pitch at a time.

During my senior year of high school I wasn't sure where my baseball career was going to take me. I had a number of Division 1 baseball schools interested in me, but I wasn't for sure where I was going to end up. Anyone who has ever gone through the recruiting process knows the kind of headache it can be. One school may like you, another one might not. One school might sign someone and tell you they don't think they have room for you while another school might lose a recruit and suddenly gain a huge interest in you. I immediately learned that I needed to have patience and let things play out.

Most athletes sign in the fall signing period, while many others sign in the spring. I did neither. I waited, and by no means by choice, until I had actually graduated from high school before I made my college decision. Early on in the recruiting process I had a few junior college scholarships, a couple Division II offers, but none from Division I schools. I was dead set on going to a D-I school but I didn't have any scholarship offers. In order to get one, I had to have patience. Eventually, in the spring of my senior year, I finally got the offers I had long waited for. I had been in contact with schools like Nebraska, Creighton, Minnesota, Kansas State, Northern Iowa, Northern Illinois, Iowa, along with Nebraska Omaha, Iowa Western Community College,

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and Indian Hills Community College. Some eventually offered scholarships, while others offered walk-on deals. Either way, I finally had the opportunity I had always wanted, to play Division I baseball. I chose the University of Iowa in early June of my senior summer. I can still remember the day I committed like it was yesterday.

Once on the Iowa campus, my patience was tested again. I had to wait my turn to get on the field. Hitting .083 as a freshman didn't help and it wasn't what I would call a hot start. I didn't get a lot of at bats, and I actually found myself pitching more than playing in the field my first year. After the season, I looked myself in the mirror and realized that there was a lot of room for me to improve. I obviously had a lot that I needed to work on. I spent the next summer back home playing in a summer league trying to figure out what went wrong my freshman year. I spent hours and hours in the cage working on my swing. As much as I wanted immediate results, I knew I wasn't going to get them. I spent the summer focusing on the process of getting better and the hard work and right mind set paid off. I showed up on campus in August, not only as a sophomore, but also as a completely different player.

In my second year at Iowa I worked with a mental conditioning coach by the name of Brian Cain. Working with Brian changed my life. I spent a weekend listening and learning from him, a weekend that ultimately sparked my interest in Sports Psychology and the mental game. I specifically remember his talk about car headlights and 200 feet at a time. His analogy was that if you drove a car from New York City to Los Angeles and left in the middle of the night, you wouldn't be able to see all the way to your destination. All you could see was the 200 feet right in front of you that your headlights allowed you to. His message was that if you focused on the 200 feet right in front of you, and then after that you focused on the next 200 feet in front of you and so on, you would ultimately reach your destination, and in this case, end up in LA. When traveling, you don't get to your destination focusing on the big picture or thousands of miles in front of you. You get to your destination by taking it 200 feet at a time.

In other words, Brian taught me not to worry so much about the future and where I wanted to go or what I wanted to do. Instead, he taught me to take things one day at a time. If I took care of business today, and then the next day after that, and then the next day after that, I would end up exactly where I wanted to be. He taught me to have patience and take advantage of the time that I had on my hands right now. It's not always about the end result in terms of what you're working for. In school, when you get your grades back at the end of the day, everyone wants to get that "A" when final grades come out. Don't get me wrong, the grade is important, but the end result of the grade isn't quite as important as what you learned and the knowledge you gained along the way. It's the process of getting that final good grade that really counts. Brian's message in his lesson, that it is important to focus on the process, not the result, turned out to be one of the biggest lessons I've learned in my life.

Like college, my path to professional baseball also tested my patience. I broke my arm as a senior at Iowa when I was hit by a pitch in late April in a game against Michigan State. With that one pitch my future became iffy and my goals and dreams seemed to be put on hold. For as long as I could remember I wanted to get drafted and play pro ball. Now, I wasn't sure if that was going to happen. When the draft finally rolled around, I was medically cleared, but anyone who has ever been immobilized for a few months knows that it takes some time to get the strength and flexibility back that you had before an injury.

In the 26th round of the 2009 MLB Draft I got a call from a scout from the Florida Marlins, now the Miami Marlins. He told me that they wanted to take a second baseman in the next round and that I was one they liked. He then asked how my arm was. I felt it was best to be honest and I told him exactly what was up, I was cleared but it would take a few weeks to get back into baseball shape. I hadn't gotten my hopes up that I would be drafted as a result of the injury, but this call had my hopes skyrocketing. As the 27th round came I watched closely on my computer in Iowa City with some former college teammates of mine as the Marlins selected on pick 818 a second baseman from Pepperdine. I got a phone call back from the

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Marlins a few rounds later saying they were worried about my arm being healthy and that's why they didn't take me. As a result, I wasn't drafted by the Marlins, or any other team in the 2009 MLB draft.

I spent the next few weeks rehabbing my arm in Iowa City with my athletic trainer, Natalie Bumpass, all while sitting by my phone waiting for it to ring in hopes that someone wanted to offer me a free agent contract. Not only did the time in the training room test my patience, but it also tested Natalie's as well. I had to have patience and trust the rehab process. I also had to realize it was going to take some time before I was back to full strength. I couldn't just snap my fingers and be healed like I would have liked. It was hard for me to do, but with Natalie's help my arm gradually got better and back into the shape I needed for baseball.

During my rehab I had conversations with the Texas Rangers and the Chicago Cubs, but nothing came of it. After about two weeks of waiting I called my college hitting coach, Ryan Brownlee, and he told me I needed to go and find a place to play. He said I needed to show everyone I was healthy, and I agreed. My only option at the time was independent ball, and to be honest I really didn't want to go that route. Yes in independent ball I would get paid to play, but these teams weren't affiliated with a Major League organization. However, it is possible to be signed by an affiliated team out of an independent league. It seemed like my best option at the time, but more importantly, it was my only option.

I have had many friends play in independent leagues and there's nothing wrong with these teams or leagues, but I had it stuck in my mind that I never wanted to go play independent ball. I had tried being patient and letting things work themselves out, but like I said, this was my only remaining option. I had always wanted to sign with a Major League team, so I made the only logical choice I had. I picked up the phone and made a few phone calls. Fortunately enough for me, the Sioux City Explorers of the American Association needed a guy and offered me a contract at the end of June.

I played with the Explorers for 8 games, making trips to Lincoln, Nebraska, Wichita, Kansas, and a few home games in Sioux City, Iowa. I played decent and hit well while mostly playing the middle infield. To this day, I'll never forget that Friday morning in Sioux City when my phone rang. Steve Abney, a scout with the Cleveland Indians was on the other line. He told me the Indians needed a guy and that he had heard good things about me. All of my patience had finally paid off, and I was offered a contract by the Cleveland Indians. On July 7th, 2009, in Ohio my dream was official; I had signed a professional contract with an affiliated organization.

I am a firm believer that things happen for a reason, in one way or another. I feel that the problems and struggles I have encountered in my baseball career have only shown me how to really love, respect, and appreciate the game as I should. It has also helped me grow as a person. Anyone who has ever been hurt will tell you they would do just about anything to get back out on the field. For me, it took an injury to really show me how much this game meant to me. If it wasn't for the patience that I had learned through the tough times and trials of my career, I wouldn't be who I am today or be anywhere close to where I am at right now in my baseball career.

If I hadn't gone through the trials, experienced the hardships, and had my patience tested over and over again, like I've said before, I wouldn't be the person I am today. You see, the process of my college experience and the process of getting into pro ball have ingrained in me many values and life lessons that I would have otherwise never learned. Making it to a Division I athletic program or being a professional athlete isn't what defines me as a person. The end result of wherever my playing career takes me isn't what defines me as a person. At the end of the day what defines me are the many lessons that I have learned through the process of trying to get where I've wanted to go in life. It wasn't the outcome that changed me as a person; it was the life lessons along the way.

Patience not only has helped me in my life, but it can do the same in yours. I am sure if you looked back on your past experiences you would find many times when your patience has been tested. My

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message to you would be that if you have a dream or you have a goal, go out and get it. If something stands in your way, have the patience to find a way around or through whatever is standing in your way. We live in a "right now" world. Everyone wants to have things done as soon as possible. The thing with that is "right now" isn't always possible, but if you focus on the process, the small things, and take it step by step, eventually, with patience of course, you will end up exactly where you want to be.

Anything is possible in school, in athletics, and in the working world. If you work hard, have the right mind set and a little bit of patience, you can go a long way in life. You might have to do a few things you don't want to, you might have to wait longer than you'd like, you might have to take a few unusual routes to get where you want to go, but if you focus on taking care of business one step at a time and have the patience to allow things to happen, you will end up right where you want to be.

This 2012 season had tested my patience. As I said earlier, I bounced around from team to team and experienced bouts of success separated by bouts of struggle. During those times, I tried not to get too high or too low. Being hard on yourself during a 140 game season will take its toll on you. When I struggled I just had to have patience and believe in myself that I would be able to turn things around. Just like those instances earlier in my career, I had to have patience to make it through this specific game on this night. I also had to make sure I focused on the process even though, as I've mentioned, sometimes it's hard to do.

Once I was back in the dugout for the bottom half of the first, I didn't have a lot of time to relax as I was up second for us this inning. I grabbed my bat and helmet and made my way to the on deck circle to get loose. As I left the dugout a few fans who I usually make small talk with before my first at bat asked if I was excited to play every position. One little kid even asked if I was really going to pitch. I assured them I was ready for the challenge and appreciated them showing their support.

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Tonight we were facing Miguel Celestino from Salem. He was a tall righty with a good fastball. Tony Wolters was the lead-off guy for us. Tony was a top prospect in our organization as a middle infielder. He was a good defender and hit from the left side of the plate. He was a high school draft guy with a bright future ahead of him. Celestino didn't start off great and Tony walked on four consecutive pitches. As I made my way to the plate, I got a pretty loud welcome as I was announced. It was a cool feeling having the crowd into the game, but despite that, I had to focus on the task at hand. Since Tony walked on four straight pitches, I knew I had to see a few pitches before I took the bat off my shoulder.

I took the first pitch for a ball, and the second for a called strike. I barely got a piece of the third pitch I saw and fouled it off. I took a step out of the box to refocus, took a deep breath, and then got back in the box. I stood in with a one ball and two strike count, got a good pitch to hit, and laced it into left field just out of the reach of Salem's shortstop James Kang's glove. As I rounded first I let out a huge sigh of relief. Nothing gets rid of the nerves and jitters of a game quite like your first chance at some action, whether it's in the field or at the plate. I also got that first knock out of the way, which as any baseball player knows, is huge in your first at bat. With the single, I could also cross off one of three things on my to do list for the night, a base hit.

With runners on first and second and no outs, our three hole hitter, Giovanni Urshela, hit a ground ball to Salem's third baseman Michael Almanzar, who flipped it to Sean Coyle at second for the force out and the first out of the inning. I was out on the play, but we still had base runners and a chance to score. As I got back to the dugout I was finally able to catch my breath for the first time since the start of the game. After the first pitch everything had happened so quickly up to this point. It's kind of like being in the zone, as you don't really know what's going on until you have a second to stop and think about it. I wanted to make sure I slowed the game down because I wanted to enjoy every second of it.

After catching my breath, I made my way over to the specially made lineup card we were using that outlined everyone's position for

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each inning of the entire game. Not only would I be playing multiple positions, but others would as well. Edwin, our manager, was convinced that someone would screw up the whole thing if he didn't lay it all out on paper. Looking back, he was probably right. I found my name and made sure I knew the order of the positions I would be playing tonight: right field, center field, left field, first base, second base, shortstop, third base, catcher, and finally pitcher. After I repeated it to myself a few times, I took a deep breath and took a seat on the bench to watch the rest of the inning.

With runners on the corners, Ronny Rodriguez lined into a double play to end our scoring threat. The first inning was over. Neither team scored and the scoreboard showed zeros in the run column after one inning of play. After a quick drink of Gatorade I got up off the bench and tried to gather myself. With all of the emotions I felt, I simply reminded myself to stay relaxed, stay in the present moment, try not to do too much, and go out there and have fun. I then grabbed my hat and glove and made my way out to the field and my next position.

Chapter 2

Perspective

“Is the glass half empty, or is it half full?”

“A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

- Winston Churchill



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Growing up I always envisioned playing one of three positions in my backyard. I was always the shortstop, the pitcher, or the centerfielder. As a kid, those were always the main guys and stars you would see on TV. You turn on Sportscenter and you would see shortstops like Derek Jeter, centerfielders like Ken Griffey Jr. and pitchers like Greg Maddux. Those were the kind of guys I always wanted to be. I was fortunate enough growing up to be able to pitch and play shortstop quite a bit. My first baseball jersey was number thirty-one in honor of Maddux, and if anyone watched me play in high school, college, or on this particular night in Carolina, they would have seen number two on my back, in honor of my favorite player growing up, Derek Jeter.

Center field was the one position I never got much of a chance to play. Sure, I played it when I was growing up, but the older I got, the more I focused on pitching and playing the infield. My freshman year of high school I played occasionally in left field but that was it. In college I never went beyond the infield dirt. It wasn't until professional baseball that I found myself in the outfield on a somewhat regular basis. Before this night, I couldn't tell you the last time I found myself in center field.

As the inning started I was amazed at the change in scenery. From center field you could see everything. I had a clear view of the strike zone, a great view of the pitch, and an entire view of the field. I was able to read the hitter's swing pretty well, get a good jump on the ball, and also be able to anticipate where the ball would be hit depending on the location of the pitch. Above all of that, on this night, I also had a spectacular view of a pretty packed Five County Stadium.

Anyone who has ever switched positions on the baseball field knows the different perceptions of the game that each position portrays. For me, the biggest change growing up was switching from my natural position of shortstop to the other side of the diamond and second base. It was such a different perspective from the left side to the right side of the infield. Neither of those even compared to center field for me. The view of the stadium, seeing the entire infield walk their way into a ready position and pre-pitch setup before each pitch,

or even hearing the echoes of the voices of my teammates off of the center field wall. It put baseball into a whole new perspective for me.

The other thing that's different about the outfield is how boring it is, at least for me. Playing the middle infield allows you to pretty much be involved on every pitch, whether it's backing up the pitcher on throws back from the catcher or throwing the ball around the infield after a strikeout. Being close to the action allows you to feel more engaged and with your close proximity to the hitter you must be ready for the ball to be rocketed at you every time the ball leaves the pitcher's hand. In the outfield, you're lucky if you have a ball hit to you once or twice a game, let alone in one inning.

The top half of the second inning allowed me to get the ball while it was in play for the first time. I moved over to center field and Cid moved from center over to right field. The first hitter of the inning for Salem, Drew Hedman, struck out swinging. Salem's second baseman, Sean Coyle, was then hit by a pitch. Our pitcher, Jordan Cooper, notched his third strikeout of the evening on the next hitter, David Renfroe. With Coyle on first and two outs, the next hitter, David Chester, singled sharply up the middle to me in center field. Coyle immediately left on contact and made his way safely into third base.

I might have had a play on Coyle and had a chance to throw him out, but instead of trying to do too much, especially in a position I wasn't all that familiar with, I kept the ball in front of me and fired it into second base. With Renfroe's single, there were now runners on the corners with two outs. Coop then took care of business and finished off the inning by getting Jayson Hernandez to pop out to Ronny Rodriguez at shortstop. We kept Salem off the scoreboard again and headed towards the dugout for the bottom of the second inning.

We hadn't had much luck playing Salem during this particular season. It seemed like whenever they played us they crushed everything, and I mean everything. They were an aggressive team and had scored a ton of runs against us, to the tune of eight a couple times, ten, twelve, and even sixteen at different times this season. For

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us to hold them scoreless early on was a huge boost to our team's confidence heading into the middle of the game.

The different perspective of playing center field on this night struck a chord with me, my career, and my life. Often times in life, the way you think and how you perceive things are vital to your success or your failures. It's crazy how you can take one event or one object and two different people can perceive that object or event differently. The easiest example of this would be the old glass of water question. If there is a glass sitting in front of you, and it is filled up halfway with water, is it half full or half empty? You always hear people say the pessimist says it's half empty, but the optimist says it's half full. The cool thing about all of that is your perception of that event is solely based on how you think.

As I mentioned before, my sophomore year at the University of Iowa, and to this day, I have had the pleasure of working with Brian Cain. If you have ever met him or worked with him in any fashion, you know he's an extremely motivational person. He'll make you feel like you can run through a brick wall and eat fire, literally (been there, done that). The thing I love about him and what he teaches is that he challenges the way you think. Brian brought to my attention one of the best examples of perception I have ever seen. Have you ever seen the FedEx logo, the one on all of the delivery trucks driving around? I am sure you have, probably many times. Even though you have seen it many times have you ever noticed the arrow in the empty space between the E and the X at the end of the logo? If not, check out the logo below and find the arrow.



Pretty cool and crazy isn't it? The cool thing about it is that the arrow has always been there, it just took a change of perception, a change of thinking, to see it. There are a lot of different perception-

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changing images out there. You can search online for different ones. Search for "old man or the young lady", "two faces or a vase", and also the "3D cube". If you look at those pictures one way, you see the first in the set, the old man, the two faces, or a cube in one direction. If you change your perception and how you look at the picture, you'll see a young lady, a vase, and a cube in a different direction. The picture itself never changes, but how you look at it does and that makes all the difference.

This lesson not only works on really cool pictures, but it works in athletics and life. If you change the way you look at something or change the way you think about something, you open up a whole new world, and sometimes a whole new set of opportunities. A lot of times people perceive their problems as impossible to overcome. What people don't realize is that if you change the way you look at a problem and change the way you think about a problem, many times you find ways around or through that problem, or you may even find that it's not even a problem at all.

Another exercise that demonstrates a change in perception involves a two by four board. This particular demonstration makes sense of how you can look at a task, and even though the task is the same, the way you perceive it is drastically different. If you lay a two by four board on the ground and have someone walk across it, they'll tell you it's relatively easy to do. Now let's say you raise the board off the ground and use it to make a walkway that connects two tables roughly four or five feet off the ground. If that same person again performed the task they would tell you that this one was harder than the previous attempt.

The question this exercise raises is how is it possible the task gets harder when the task stays the same – walking across the board. No matter how high off the ground or how low to the ground the board is, the task of walking across it is always the same. The only thing that changes is your perception of the task. The perceived danger of falling makes the second task seem harder, even though it is the same task as the board being on the floor.

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This happens all the time in athletics. People perceive things and sometimes make them harder than they really are. If you're a pitcher, it shouldn't matter who the batter is that you're facing. It doesn't matter if it's your mom or dad or Josh Hamilton or Miguel Cabrera standing in the box. The task of making quality pitches, playing pitch to pitch, and battling your rear end off doesn't change. If you're a hitter it doesn't matter who is on the mound. Your task of having a good approach, getting a good pitch to hit, and timing it up doesn't change. Too often we let other people dictate our perception of an event instead of seeing the event or task as what it really is.

As a professional athlete whose season runs March through September, I have to work to make money in the off season when I'm not playing. As many baseball players do, I give lessons. I enjoy working with kids who have dreams and aspirations and I enjoy helping them along their path to achieve those things. As anyone knows with youth athletics, as well as middle school and high school teams, usually there is a varsity, junior varsity, and freshman team, or an A, B, or C team. Everyone wants to be on that A team, or the varsity team, but, depending on the sport, there are only a few select spots on each team.

One off season I was working with a kid and the topic of changing the way you think and changing your perception came up. He wasn't the greatest athlete, but what impressed me most about this kid was that he had the right mindset and was looking at things with the right perspective. He was going to be an 8th grader in the fall and his coach had asked some guys from the 8th grade team to bump down and play on the 7th grade team. Because his age fit the requirements he was able to do so. Many kids would look at this as a demotion or as a problem. They would think that they aren't good enough, that they'll never make it, or that the coach doesn't know what he is talking about. This particular kid looked at it in a different way. He looked at this as an opportunity to play more games, get more at bats, and become a better baseball player. That's the kind of mindset a winner has, and as a result, he improved tremendously.

Along the same lines, I can find examples of this in my own life. I was never a very big kid and was often told I was too small for this or not strong enough for that. I first tried football in middle school, and I played for both the A team and the B team. I didn't know or realize it at the time, but looking back on it I was able to spend more time on the field, and as a result I learned more and became a much better player. Had I only been on the A team I could only have played 4 quarters. Playing on both teams allowed me to play 6-8 quarters providing me many more opportunities for improvement.

Flash forward to my sophomore year in high school and the same thing happened in basketball. I would start on the JV team, play 2-3 quarters with them, and then suit up for with the varsity squad and play 3-4 quarters more quarters with those guys. That year, I made huge strides as a basketball player. By no means was I a super star, but my junior and senior years I had more success because of the time I spent playing on JV as a sophomore. My ball handling skills improved, my shooting improved, but more importantly my decision-making improved. As hard as you practice, and as much as you try to create game situations in practice, nothing can get you better prepared for a real game than actually playing in real games. Had I only suited varsity and let my ego tell me I was too good for JV, I wouldn't have seen the improvements nor would I have gained the valuable experience I got that season.

Another great example of having the right perspective in athletics is in my hometown of Council Bluffs, Iowa with the Attack Volleyball Club. I've gotten to know Mark Andrews, Jenyi Bergsten, and a little about the club from my time working at Midwest Sporting Goods. The rule with Attack is that no one gets cut after tryouts. Everyone has a team whether it's the A team, B team, or C team of each age group. Mark makes a point to let the girls know that when teams come out, they aren't set in stone and you can move up or move down depending on performance and improvement.

This makes a lot of sense to me when talking about youth sports. Mark has mentioned multiple times that sometimes girls from the C team or D team at ages twelve or thirteen end up being his best

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players by the time they are sixteen and seventeen. The players that do move up do so not because they looked at not being on the A team as a negative, but rather because they looked at it as a positive. It allowed them to work on their game and get better, rather than sitting on the bench and not playing much with a higher team.

What all of these stories have in common is that these athletes took what most people would call a problem and turned it into an opportunity. They changed their perspective. They saw the white arrow in the FedEx logo when everyone else was too busy looking at the first thing that showed up, the logo and the team or level they were playing at. The ones who saw the arrow took an opportunity to get better instead of having the problem of not being associated with the top team. I'll tell you one thing, when it comes to the game of life, these kinds of kids, the ones who look at those situations as a positive, can be on my team any day.

Athletes that are very successful rarely think negatively. They will take the same everyday problems a normal person would look at and say "why me" to and answer it with "why not me". You will be amazed at how much more enjoyable your experiences are in life when you think positively and have the right perspective. Next time you're in a tough spot, look at whatever is in front of you with a change of perspective, look at it as an opportunity, not as a problem. You don't have to be in the Major Leagues, the NFL, or the NBA to be able to do this. All you need to do to be effective with a change in perspective is to change the way you think and how you see things in your life.

If you happened to make it out to Five Country Stadium on this night or during the 2012 season, in the bottom of the second inning you may have played or experienced a little game called TooleTime Trivia. It's the new modern day version of trivia where I was always an option as one of the possible four answers to a Trivia Question, even if it made absolutely no sense. It was always a multiple choice question and it was always played up on the video board. I, of course, along with a few loyal fans, always thought I was the correct answer.

9 in 9

One of my favorite TooleTime Trivia questions of the season was along the lines of which player was born in such and such country, the country being one of either the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Columbia, or Venezuela. Among the possible answers were guys like Ronny Rodriguez, Jesus Aguilar, Delvi Cid, Giovanny Urshela, Jose Flores, Francisco Jimenez, Danny Salazar and of course Justin Toole. TooleTime Trivia was always fun and always gave me something to look forward to and laugh at in between innings. My teammates and the fans enjoyed it as well.

On this particular night, the trivia question was this: Mudcats super-utility man Justin Toole earned which honor during the 2011 season? The options for answers were: A, Carolina League All Star. B, Indians Hitter of the Week. C, Carolina League Player of the Week. Or D, Greatest Tweeter of All Time. The answer was A, as I was a Carolina League All Star the year before. (But to this day I will argue that both A and D were correct.)

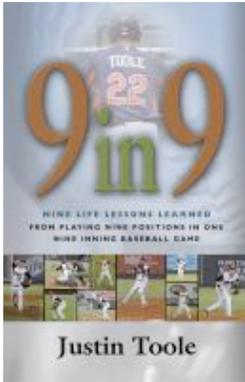
In the bottom of the second inning we pushed across our first two runs of the game. Tyler Cannon led off hitting a ball hard, only it was right at the shortstop Kang for the first out of the inning. Todd Hankins was then hit by a pitch and quickly stole second base. As he slid into second the catcher's throw got away from the middle infielders, and he easily scooted over to third. Hankins' heads-up base running had him 90 feet closer to scoring the first run of the game. With Hankins on third and one out, Dwight Childs struck out swinging. Marcus Bradley then walked to put runners on the corners for Delvi Cid. Cid got a good pitch to hit and crushed a ball into center field over Brandon Jacobs head for a double. As the ball reached the wall Hankins and Bradley both raced home and scored the first two runs of the game. With Cid on second, Tony Wolters then grounded out to second baseman Sean Coyle to end the inning.

I think in this game it was important to take an early lead. With Salem having smacked us in the mouth a few times earlier in the season, it was important to change the perception that they weren't going to do that again. We had lost to them the night before 8-2, and so to get the momentum in our dugout early on was huge. Often,

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when teams roll into a game thinking they will win and find themselves behind early, they can't quite recover. Hopefully, tonight would be one of those times for Salem.

The other cool thing about the night was that the crowd was really into the game. I don't know if it was the anticipation of me playing all the positions or the good Saturday night Yuengling beer deals (I'd say probably the beer deals). All I know is that it's really fun to play in front of fans that are into the game. It helped not only that we had jumped out with a few runs early, but also that our pitcher Jordan Cooper was dealing. He had been lights out for us the past few weeks and he carried that momentum right into tonight. I couldn't wait to hopefully close the door on the mound in the ninth inning for a Mudcats victory.



On August 25th, 2012, author Justin Toole got the opportunity to play all nine positions in one nine inning Minor League baseball game. This book tells the story of that game and each chapter talks about a different position he played that night. Within each chapter, you will find a different life lesson that he has learned while playing baseball. Nine positions in one nine inning game - nine life lessons he's learned through playing the game of baseball.

9 in 9

Nine Life Lessons Learned From Playing Nine Positions In One Nine Inning Baseball Game

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