

4 Years to the Day

Chris Davis launched his 31st homerun this past Sunday night leading the Baltimore Orioles to a 4-2 win over the New York Yankees. Davis, MLB's hottest hitter, has fans everywhere all asking the same question- How did he just wake up one day and become great?

"Something just clicked for me," Davis said. *"I can't really put my finger on it. There's no secret recipe. It was just a feeling I had."*

What Davis said next is critically important- *"I think it was just a combination of playing every day, having some success, being on a winning team, just being able to relax for the first time and be able to really enjoy the game and not feel like it was a chore to go out there and play."*

In other words, Davis is now playing with confidence. It hasn't always been that way..

May 29, 2009

Chris Davis, then a Texas Ranger, strikes out his first six times up in a double header against the Oakland A's. When he flies out in his seventh at bat the Texas fans mock him with a derisive standing ovation for getting the ball in play. Davis contemplates quitting. He questions if he is even doing what he's supposed to be doing, and wonders what his potential as a player actually is. He wonders if he is trying to succeed to please everybody else, his family, his friends, and he becomes tired of constantly hearing about his performance from others.

Haven't we all been there? Haven't we all heard Mom and Dad shouting instructions to players about mechanical adjustments from the stands? How often do friends and family members critique a player's performance after a game? When a ballplayer struggles how often are private lessons booked with the hopes that an immediate remedy can be found?

"When you're struggling it's tough. Sometimes you want to be left alone and figure it out for yourself," said Davis.

Soon after, Texas gave up on Davis. Realizing his potential, Texas Rangers GM commented that if Davis suddenly "goes off," then that's something they'll have to deal with.

Sometimes it doesn't happen overnight. Sometimes it takes four years. Exactly four years!

May 29, 2013

Chris Davis goes 4 for 4 with 2 home runs and 3 RBI's on Chris Davis Shirt Night prompting the nickname "Crush" Davis. After the game he reflects on where he came from and where he is now.

On May 29, 2009 Davis doubted himself, questioned his ability and contemplated quitting. On May 29, 2013 he is able to relax and enjoy the game. The game is fun for him and no longer feels like it's a chore. What changed? The answer is not as big of a mystery as most people think. In fact, it's simple- Chris Davis got his confidence.

The game of baseball is a battle between one's fear and confidence. Fear typically wins out over confidence because of the failure rate and the mental anguish that coincides with failing often in front of a lot of people. In 2009, the failure to live up to expectations was tearing Davis apart.

Davis undoubtedly made some mechanical adjustments during the past four years. Without question he worked on his swing. But, something much more noteworthy has happened here that young

developing players can and should learn from. As culture and society has shaped young minds to prefer overnight delivery, drive-through-fast-food service, Instagram, and auto-correct, success in baseball requires extreme patience and hard work. It takes far more time and effort than you may realize. If you believe in the premise outlined in Malcolm Goldwell's Outliers, it takes 10,000 hours to perfect a skill and baseball is an imperfect game. In addition to drill work and physical training, players must invest time, effort, and resources into how they can effectively cope in a game driven by failure.

Davis' dramatic turnaround brings to the forefront a new trend in baseball in which top coaches and programs are now placing an equal, and in some cases greater emphasis on mental conditioning with confidence serving as the goal of every player's mental game.

Whether it's mental conditioning coaches such as Ken Ravizza, Brian Cain, or Justin Dehmer, there is a current movement that helps players go beyond just making mechanical adjustments and taking those necessary practice reps. Mental conditioning coaches will tell you that the game has much more to do with the six inches between your ears than it does anything else. Mental conditioning strategies have recently exploded and there is currently a wealth of information available to help train players how to think and also how to improve their focus when performing in an adrenalin situation.

A consistent theme in mental conditioning emphasizes that the game of baseball is not good *or* bad. Baseball is good *and* bad. A player is not a good player or a bad player. A player is both good and bad as they go through the inevitable peaks and valleys that even a budding All-Star like Chris Davis can personally attest to.

Mental toughness in our baseball program is defined as a positive reaction to a negative situation. As naysayers now tweet out unfounded allegations that Davis must have used performance enhancing drugs, the real reason that he has found success has to do with his mental toughness, not the size of his biceps. From the start of his career, he has always looked like a linebacker, but that doesn't make him tough. Handling failure the way he has is what really makes him a tough guy. A proper amount of mental conditioning can teach young players how to handle the adversity of the game the way Davis has.

One strategy suggests that players should not look back in the rearview mirror, but should instead look through the windshield at what is in front of them, namely the present moment.

Chris Davis isn't looking back at 2009. He's having fun. He's relaxed. He's thrilled to be contributing to a winning team. He's supremely confident.

No, it may not have been sudden, but Davis has gone off..